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"YOU DO NOT LOVE ME!" SHE GASPED.

A GUILTY PASSION.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"My old love in the garden chair,
Looking upward soft and shy,
With her oval face and rippling hair,
And the rich white dress she used to wear,
And her work laid idly by."

"BROWNIE, I am sure you ought to stop working. It will try your eyes if you do that fine embroidery by this uncertain light."

"I can see plainly, mother. Look what a golden glory there is still in the West," and Hester Barrington, commonly called "Brownie," pointed with one slender finger towards the sun, who was just disappearing to rest amid a splendour of purple, orange and pink cloud.

"It can't do you any good, dear. Think of your precious sight. There will be plenty of time to finish that during the week, I am sure."

"Very well, mother," said the girl, submissively, putting her work on the little rustic table at her side and leaning back luxuriously in the comfortable wicker chair, which was placed on the lawn a few feet from the window at which her mother sat regarding her with fond and loving eyes.

It was hardly to be wondered at that Mrs. Barrington regarded her daughter fondly, for she was a girl any mother would have been proud of.

She was very pretty and very graceful. Her small person was beautifully made, and her little head rose from a throat that sculptors might have taken for a model.

Her face was a perfect oval, lighted by velvet-brown eyes that looked out dreamily from a border of thick black lashes; her hair was a rich dark brown, and her skin was brown, with a vivid carmine on lip and cheek, while her features were straight and regular.

Her brother Jim, six years her senior, had called her "Brownie" when she was a toddling mite on account of her gipsy-like colouring, and the pet name clung to her tenaciously.

Speak of Hester or Miss Barrington and people in the neighbourhood would begin to consider who was under discussion; talk of "Brownie" and everyone knew who was meant.

Jim and Hester were Mrs. Barrington's only children. Her husband died soon after the birth of the latter, leaving her disconsolate, as far as his companionship was concerned, but comfortably off; and she lived at Whitebrook, the pretty, old, rambling house where her brief married life had been spent after his death, doing her best to bring up the children as he would have done had he lived.

Hester, of course, was tractable enough, learned languages, botany, conchology, and all the other "ologies," along with a heap of other things in a most exemplary manner, considering she was of a gay, active, bright temperament, and preferred chasing butterflies, climbing trees, galloping about on her pony, and playing

cricket with her brother to sitting beside a grim-faced governess laying in a stock of knowledge.

Jim proved less easy to deal with. Secretly Mrs. Barrington thought that there must have been gipsy-blood in her husband's veins, for the boy, like the girl, had a brown skin, brown hair, and those almost indescribably dark, black-lashed eyes, peculiar to the Romany.

Both children were extremely like their father and resembled not at all their mother; and Jim, moreover, early showed a restless desire for change and travel, a dislike to having a roof over his head and a fixed dwelling-place, and never rested until his mother put him into Her Majesty's Navy, where scope was given to his desire for constant change of sights and scenes, and dwelling-places.

It was a grief to the mother to part with her dearly-loved son, to give him over to the power of the merciless ocean, that sometimes arises and engulfs all one holds dear, to let him go for cruises that lasted years, and in all the time never once to hold his hand, or kiss his cheek, or give him her blessing.

Still, she was a sensible woman, and knew it is not well to thwart the inclinations of a bold, high-spirited, restless boy. So after a long and serious conversation with her old and trusted friend, Mrs. Sutherland, of Creek Abbey, she consented to his becoming a sailor, and took the necessary steps towards getting him made a naval cadet.

She had no cause to repent of this step. The discipline and regularity observed on board a man-o'-war had a beneficial effect on him.

While retaining his dash and fearlessness, he became more amenable and reasonable, and at twenty-four was nothing save a credit and a comfort to her, her only sorrow about him being that she could not enjoy the daily pleasure of his society.

Brownie also felt the want of it, though not to such an extent, for she had a companion, a most devoted and charming one, in the shape of Cyril Sutherland, the young master of the Abbey, who, being just about Jim's age, and having known her all her life, was a delightful friend, one whom she had alternately petted and treated cruelly since she was a mite in a white frock and big blue sash, whose chief delight had been to pull the boy's wavy, fair locks that grew rather long and luxuriantly at that period of his existence.

Allegorically speaking, she had continued to pull his locks, for she was a capricious little fairy, and no end of a tease, and delighted in torturing the great, tall, strong man, who could easily have taken her up in his arms and carried her like a baby.

She liked to order him about, to have him as her slave; and all went well while he obeyed her imperious commands; when he objected, or rebelled, or wished to have his own way, which, it must be admitted, was very seldom, then she would turn on him, tease and torture him by her capriciousness, or freeze him with her coldness until he was fain to cry *peccavi*, and begin again on the old terms of "you order, and I obey," which suited her, and didn't exactly suit him, yet which he was nevertheless constrained to pretend did, and wait his time, like many another man has, until the victor is overthrown, and becomes the vanquished.

"Is Cyril coming this evening?" inquired Mrs. Barrington, leaning forward a little, and toying with a scarlet rose that peeped through the window in an intrusive and inquisitive fashion.

"I am not certain, mother."

"Why not?" asked the elder lady with some surprise.

"He went to London yesterday, remember."

"Oh, yes; by the way, I had forgotten it. But I thought he was to come back to-day!"

"He intended to if he could get everything done, only he said he had so much to see to that he did not think he could possibly get back to Creech until late to-night."

"Then I don't suppose we shall see him!"

"I hardly think so."

"It is nice now."

"Yes. He told me he had twenty different places to go to. Just fancy that, mother!" and Brownie turned round and looked at her mother with wide-open eyes.

"Twenty places! What sort of places?"

"Mostly shops. Mrs. Sutherland gave him a heap of commissions, and the sketch and directions for Jenny's dress."

"I wonder Jenny did not go with him."

"Oh, she hates London just as much as he does, and if she had gone he would have had to come back yesterday, and that would have been a terrible hurry-scurry, and Mrs. Sutherland did not want the trouble of going herself."

"She has perfect confidence in Cyril's taste!"

"Oh yes. He is quite well able to manage all the commissions she gave him properly."

"I suppose it will be a very grand affair!"

"Of course, mother. Jenny is a great heiress, and her coming-of-age ball naturally ought to be a grand affair."

"Anne seems to think so."

"Yes; and so does Cyril, and so do I."

"Really? Well, Brownie, I don't see what you have to do with it," smiled her mother, quizzically.

"A great deal," returned the girl, with a little gesture of importance. "You know how much they think of me at the Abbey."

"I know they love and spoil you, dear."

"Oh, mater! spoil me!"

"Well, pet you, then."

"That is a better word."

"I am glad that suits you. What does Jenny say to it all?"

"Of course she doesn't care a fig. You know what she is. Likes riding better than dancing, a tweed gown better than a ball-dress, and a book better than the handsomest and most fascinating man that ever lived."

"She is a queer, studious sort of a girl."

"An awfully jolly one."

"My love, that slang again," expostulated Mrs. Barrington, mildly.

"Very sorry, mother dear, only can't always help it. Think I've got into a habit of using it."

"I think you have, too, and it comes of your being so much with Cyril, I am afraid, and with Jim, when he is here."

"Oh no, mater. I think I learnt it from the Pringles," said the girl, hastily, while the carmine glowed deeper on each cheek.

"If that is the case, I am not sorry they are leaving Creek, Brownie."

"Neither am I. They are loud, vulgar girls though lively and amusing, and it is so easy to learn a bad habit."

"And so difficult to acquire good ones," sighed Mrs. Barrington.

"Well, mother," said Brownie, with mischievous gravity, "shall I try to grow like Jenny, and wear plain grey gowns without a frill or tucker, plaster my hair flat to my head and screw it in a little door-knob at the back, and take to strong boots, and reading Stuart Mill, Swedenborg, Carlyle, Sidney, and Plato?"

"Good gracious, no, child!" exclaimed the elder lady in a fright. "I'd far rather have you as you are. I don't care about girls studying books that are only meant for men, and making themselves conspicuous by a quaker-like plainness of attire."

"I don't think you need be afraid, mater," smiling, and running her little brown hand through the short, silky locks that curled all over her well-shaped head. "I couldn't plaster these down."

"Fortunately you can't, and Jenny is undeniably plain."

"She can hardly be called beautiful."

"She would be very much more presentable if she were properly and becomingly dressed."

"Yes; I wonder how she will look in the ball-gown."

"What is it to be?"

"White silk and lilies of the valley. Won't it be lovely?"

"Very pretty in itself, but terribly trying to her hair and complexion, I should say."

"Perhaps, Mother, what shall I wear?"

"I don't know yet, dear; there is plenty of time to think about it."

"Heaps. I mean it to be something *chic*."

"Of course!"

And then the elder lady settled herself comfortably for a nap, and the younger one nestled into her chair, and watched the stars come out one by one and spangle the blue vault of heaven with their gem-like brilliance, and thought of Cyril, and wondered why the last two days had appeared so long, and wished he was back with a budget of news, and then—why then a warm hand caught both hers, and a pair of moustached lips swept her brow lightly, and Cyril stood beside her.

"How dare you!" she cried, jumping up indignantly.

"Why, Brownie, I haven't seen you for thirty-six hours!" exclaimed the young man, as though that explained the whole thing satisfactorily.

"Well!"

"Well!"

"You know I never permit you to—to—kiss me," she stammered, blushing furiously the while.

"Sometimes. Last Christmas, you did, and on your birthday."

"Those were special occasions," she told him with a great show of dignity.

"And this is a special occasion."

"You should at least have asked my permission."

"I will next time, dear."

"Next time, indeed! Really it seems as though you intended it to be a matter of daily occurrence."

"I should like it to be a matter of hourly occurrence, Brownie, said the young fellow audaciously.

"Cyril!" she returned, severely, "I shall be very angry with you, and not speak to you for a whole week!"

"Don't, please. Do forgive me! See what I have brought you from town," and pulling a packet from his pocket, he stepped nearer the window into the circle of mellow light shed around by the huge moderator lamp on the table beside Mrs. Barrington, and held up an outrageously long pair of suède gloves.

"Oh!" ejaculated Brownie, forgetting her anger at the sight of the gloves she had long wanted, and coming nearer, "those are lovely ones!"

"I thought you would like them. I hunted through half the glove-shops in London before I could get them long enough, and at last found them in the Burlington Arcade."

"How awfully kind of you."

"You won't be angry any longer?" he queried doubtfully as he gave her the packet.

"No, I forgive you," she replied magnanimously, as she turned over the contents of the packet with childish glee, and drawing out a pair of white ones said, "I shall wear these at Jenny's ball."

"Yes, do, and promise me the first dance," he said eagerly.

"Of course. We always have the first together, don't we?" with a naïve upward glance from the dark velvety eyes that made his pulses throb heavily with a mad wild joy that he was fain to conceal lest it should annoy the capricious fairy beside him.

"Yes, and I hope we always shall. I think I should knock any fellow down if I saw him usurping my place and taking you out for the first dance."

"Oh, Cyril."

"I should, I am sure, so I hope you'll never give me a chance of demolishing your partner."

"I think you ought to dance it with Jenny," she remarked, demurely, letting her long lashes droop and veil her orbs.

"Pooh! I doubt if Jenny will dance at all."

"Your mother won't like that."

"No, still it can't be helped, and if she won't, she won't, and there's an end of it."

"Yes, she is very determined."

"Worse than that, obstinate—mulish—that's the right term. Come and see me to the gate, Brownie. I won't disturb Mrs. Barrington, she

looks so comfortable," with a glance at that good lady who was snoring peacefully, totally oblivious of young Sutherland's close proximity.

"Mother would like to see you," objected Brownie.

"I'll come to-morrow; ask me to lunch like a good child. Jen has one of her mummified old professors coming, and she'll prose all through the meal about Cheops and the Pyramids. I want to escape."

"I hardly think it necessary to ask you," said Miss Barrington rather pointedly.

"Fairly hit," he laughed. "I often come without it, don't I?"

"Often."

"Then I'll come to-morrow, unless you tell me not to."

"Mother will be at home."

"And will you be at home? It is you I want to see, Brownie," he told her tenderly.

"Oh, yes, I shall be at home," she answered with a thrill of happy, light-hearted laughter, and then they went down to the gate arm-in-arm, and stood by the great lilac bushes talking for a little while before they made their final adieus for the night and parted.

CHAPTER II.

"He called this afternoon,
And lingered—oh! so long,
And made me play his favourite tune
And sing his favourite song;
A skein of silk he helped to wind,
He watched me while I drew;
No brother could be half so kind,
I wish I knew—I wish I knew."

THE next morning as Mrs. Barrington and her daughter sat at breakfast, they heard the cracked notes of the postman's horn, and a few minutes after a neat-handed Phyllis brought the letters in—one for Brownie, three for her mother.

The girl's was only a bill from a local haberdasher, and the first two the elder lady opened were of a similar nature. The third she perused closely, a shadow gathering the while on her comely face, a look of perplexity stealing into her still bright eyes.

"What is it, mother?" queried Brownie, who noted these familiar signs of annoyance. "Who is that letter from?"

"My cousin, Allanore Surtees."

"Lady Surtees!" repeated the girl in surprise. "Why, it is an age since you have heard from her, is it not?"

"Yes, some time."

"What does she want?"

"She is leaving Russia."

"Yes."

"The climate is too cold, and is trying her lungs."

"Yes, and is Sir Reginald leaving too?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"He is with the embassy, dear, and can't leave."

"Oh, I see, and what is she going to do?"

"Coming to England."

"What part?"

"She wants to come here," replied Mrs. Barrington, reluctantly.

"Here? Oh, mother!"

Brownie's voice rose almost to a shriek.

"Is the idea so very distasteful to you, my dear?" asked the elder lady, gravely.

"We have been so happy here together, mother," said the girl, wistfully.

"We shall still be happy, dearest."

"A third person will make a great difference in our home life," she pouted. "We shall have no privacy. There will always be someone to listen to our confidential chats."

"Not always. Of course Allanore will be out a good deal visiting and so on."

"Not if she is an invalid, surely."

"She is not an invalid, dear; at least, not a confirmed one, such as you mean. Her lungs were never strong, and the rigours of Russia have tried them; she says," referring to the letter that lay on the table beside her, "that she has been ordered to South Devon."

"What a pity our home happens to be situated in South Devon," grumbled Brownie, interruptingly.

"And asks me to let her stay here as a favour."

"Can't you say no, mother? Can't you say the house is full, or the carpets are up, or the painters here, make some excuse?"

"Hardly. It would be very awkward if she came to the neighbourhood, stayed at Cresch, for instance, and found out that I had been telling untruths."

"Perhaps she wouldn't. She might go to Torquay."

"No; I think she would come here, near us."

"Why?"

"Because she would be lonely elsewhere. She thinks here she would soon get to know our friends and acquaintances."

"I see. She is a regular society woman, isn't she?"

"She is fond of entertainments and gaiety."

"Why has she never come to see you, mother? I never remember seeing her here."

"She has been married for fifteen years, and went abroad directly after the wedding with her husband."

"Was it a love match?"

"Well, no," replied Mrs. Barrington, fumbling with the coffee cups, and evidently embarrassed. "It was more a marriage of convenience."

"Sir Reginald is very rich, isn't he?"

"Very rich."

"Is he old?"

"He was forty-five when she married him."

"Then he is sixty now?"

"Yes."

"And how old is she?"

"Thirty-six. There is a difference of nearly a quarter of a century between them."

"Too much, mater, don't you think so?"

"I think it is better, that there is a greater chance of happiness, when husband and wife are more the same age."

"How much older than you was the pater?"

"Five years."

"Just a nice difference."

"Yes."

"Tell me, mother," said the girl suddenly, "is Lady Surtees beautiful?"

"She was very beautiful at the time of her marriage. I have not seen her since, and fifteen years often makes a great difference in a woman's appearance."

"I suppose it does. What is she like?"

"Oh—like—like a princess."

"Tall and stately?"

"She is tall, hardly stately. Still she has an extremely elegant and aristocratic look about her."

"Is she good? Do you like her, mother?" asked Brownie, earnestly.

"We had little in common, my dear, though we were sisters' children and first cousins," replied Mrs. Barrington evasively.

"Allanore liked a dinner, and a ball, or the opera, or some kind of amusement every night. She was fond of going to races, and Harlingham, and driving on the coaches to the meets in the Park, and was fond of beautiful gowns and Parisian toilets and lace and jewellery, while you know I care for none of these things like a quiet country life and a plain dress."

"I am sure she is not a good woman," said the girl quickly with some vehemence. "No one who was would sell herself to a man old enough to be her father just for the sake of getting fine clothes and fine jewels."

"Hush! my child. We ought never to judge anyone, and she can hardly be happy, for she is a childless wife."

"Perhaps she does not mind that. Perhaps she would find a child a drawback and trouble."

"I hardly think that, and, Brownie, you will try and be kind to her, won't you, for my sake?"

"Then you mean to have her here, mother?"

"I can't well help myself, dear child. She is my relative. Her mother brought me up. If I don't do it for her sake I must for Aunt Sarah's."

"There is no way of getting out of it?"

"None."

"Then I suppose we must put up with the infliction," and catching up her hat, Brownie sauntered out to the garden and began picking a nosegay in no very pleasant frame of mind.

She and her mother had been perfectly happy in their quiet country home, troubled with none of the turmoil and bustle of the busy outer world, of which they knew little, and for which they cared not at all, the peaceful monotony of their lives broken by visits from Cyril Sutherland, and an occasional one from Jim, who would come bringing with him a suggestion of the salt seabreeze in his tanned face and bluff ways, visits that were a joy and delight to them, and kept them from stagnating or getting into a groove and acquiring old-maidish habits and ways.

Young Sutherland didn't give them a chance of doing that, for his visits were not like the angels, but of very frequent occurrence, and he often suggested little trips and jaunts that were pure pleasure to them and frequently carried them off to the Abbey, where his mother welcomed warmly the friend of her girlhood, and her pretty daughter, and even Jenny Cliff the blue-stocking would throw aside her dry-as-dust old books, and emerge from the book-filled library to stroll about with Brownie, and listen to her girlish talk and light happy laughter.

It was all over, Brownie told herself dismally as she leant against the marble basin of the fountain that looked so graceful in its colourless purity amid the mass of rainbow-hued, sweetly perfumed, old-fashioned blooms, whose homely odours made the soft air sensuous and delicious.

She leant there, idly watching the gold and silver fish scamper hither and thither through the clear water, holding out her hand now and again to catch the pearly drops that fell back into the basin from the jet that spouted up towards the sky, listening to the monotonous hum of the bees, the whir and burr of many a winged insect as it flew by, the song of a joyous lark at its matins, the call of the rakish cuckoo, the lowing of the kine in the meadows, the sharp swish of the sickle as it mowed down the flower-enamelled grasses, the faint far-away sound of a steam machine, that struck oddly on her ear, as though out of place amid rural, old-world sights and sounds, and seemed to intrude unpleasantly into her reflections.

There she stood, a slight graceful figure in a quaint short-waisted frock of a creamy hue, that set off admirably her rich, glowing complexion and lustrous eyes, a dreamy, half-sad look on her sweet face as she thought of her mother and Cyril, her past happy life, and Lady Surtees who was coming; it seemed to her like a black cloud, to shadow all her bright young life and rob it of all sunshine.

"How I wish people who are not wanted wouldn't come here!" she cried, impetuously, dashing both little brown hands into the basin and frightening the gay-scaled fish terribly, for they flew hither and thither through the translucent water.

"Is that meant for me?"

"Oh no, Cyril," turning with a slight start to find the young man at her side.

"I believe it was, young lady," said Sutherland, taking both her hands in his and wiping them carefully with his handkerchief, after which he kissed them tenderly before releasing them.

"How could it be?" she queried, blushing redly, as she encountered the glance of his blue eyes, "when I did not know that you were near me to hear what I said?"

"How can I be sure of that?" he asked, teasingly. "You may have heard me coming, and have said it to give me a hint that my room would be preferred to my company."

"Don't be ridiculous, Cy. You know very well that I am just as glad to see you as I am to see Jim."

"Oh, is that all," he said, a shadow falling over his sunny face, for he didn't exactly want her to regard him in the light of a brother.

"Isn't that enough?"

"Not quite."

"Well, I don't know what more you want," she observed, innocently; "for Jim is, of course, free of the place just the same as mother

and Tare, and always welcome as you very well know."

"I'll tell you some day what more I want; and now, tell me who is coming here that you would rather have stay away."

"Lady Surtees."

"She is a cousin of your mother's, is she not?"

"Yes, and very rich, and very beautiful."

"And a widow now, I suppose?"

"Then you suppose wrong. Sir Reginald is alive and well, for all I know to the contrary."

"Then will he come here too?"

"No, business keeps him in Russia, and though you won't be able to propose to this beauty, you nevertheless will be able to flirt with the grass-widow to your heart's content."

"I neither wish to flirt with, nor propose to, her," replied Cyril, stiffly holding his head high in the air.

"Really," said Brownie, urged on by her own feeling of misery to speak disagreeably. "How good you are, quite an Admirable Crichton. You will have to be put under a glass case and shown to her ladyship as a rarity and a man who can't appreciate her loveliness."

"I can always appreciate loveliness," he said angrily and rather unwisely, "but at the same time I don't care about making love to another man's wife!"

"How good and proper you are!"

"I am not a scoundrel," he said, simply, adding a moment later, "Brownie, dear, I don't like to hear you to talk in this fashion. It is so different from your usual style."

"I shall talk as I please," she told him defiantly.

"Don't, dear, and don't let us quarrel."

"I don't want to."

"Then let us be friends and go down to the strawberry beds."

This suggestion was a fortunate one, for she was still child enough to be passionately fond of that delicious fruit, and they went down and plucked the red berries from amongst the shining green leaves, and revelled in the fresh deliciousness of them like a pair of young Sybarites, idling away the whole morning till the luncheon-bell rang, summoning them to the house, by which time they were excellent friends, and in good spirits and temper.

"You have heard of our expected guest, of course!" said Mrs. Barrington as she daintily carved a chicken.

"Yes, Brownie has been telling me about it, and she doesn't seem to like the idea of it," with a mischievous glance at the girl.

"No, I don't," she said hastily, the red colour rising angrily to her cheeks. "I like to have my mother all to myself."

"A good hint for me, only I don't mean to take it," he laughed.

"Oh, you are nobody," she said, with affected contempt, as she helped herself to salad. "It doesn't in the least matter whether you are here or not."

"My dear!" exclaimed her mother.

"It's the truth, mater. You know we never make any difference for Cyril."

"No, we certainly don't yet."

"That is what I like," he declared cheerily. "It makes me feel like one of the family."

"You are conceited enough to feel and imagine anything!" Brownie told him snubbingly.

"Of course it will be different with Lady Surtees!"

"Slightly," she sighed.

"Alianore is accustomed to a good deal of ceremony," observed Mrs. Barrington, somewhat dolefully. "I don't know how she will get on in this homely place."

"She need not stay here if she doesn't like it," remarked her daughter, significantly.

"Now, Brownie, dear, you must be civil to her," expostulated the elder lady.

"Of course, mater," she responded, carelessly. "I am not a Goth or a savage. Still, as she has invited herself, I think it will be only courteous on her part not to object to her quarters."

"I dare say she won't."

"Most probably not," struck in Cyril; "she will be too much a woman of the world to be guilty of a *faux pas* of that glaring description."

"Do you like women of the world?" asked Brownie, suddenly fixing her dark eyes on him.

"Fairly well. They are generally amusing, and don't hurt one's susceptibilities."

In after days he remembered those words, and regretted having said them, bitterly.

"In fact," said Miss Barrington, with some show of annoyance, "they are infinitely preferable to mawkish bread-and-butter misses."

"I did not say so," he hastened to assure her, "and as for bread-and-butter misses, I don't think there are many of them about now; the tribe seems nearly extinct."

"Indeed!"

"Come and sing to me, Brownie," he pleaded, as she rose from the table. "I am dying to hear that new song you told me about."

"Well, you mustn't die," she told him smiling up at him; "so I'll sing to you," and together they went into the small drawing-room, the pleasantest room in the house, he thought, because he had spent many happy hours there with Hester Barrington.

It was a very pretty room, low-ceiled, old-fashioned, with shining oaken boards, and a couple of quaint latticed windows, with cushioned seats beneath, and a variety of knick-knacks and ornaments, and comfortable, if antique, chairs, and some Turkey mats here and there on the glossy boards, and a profusion of sweet-smelling flowers, the perfume from which the greedy air caught and retained.

"Sing me this!" he pleaded, after hearing the new song.

"Yes, I love that," she said, quickly.

"I wish I was this song," he whispered in her ear, his eyes fixed on her face, where the rich blood was mantling

"Cyril, you are talking nonsense!" she murmured.

"No, I am not. I'd rather be anything you loved than myself, for I am sure you don't care for me."

"Of course I don't," she retorted, quickly, angry with herself for blushing so furiously, and not wishing him to guess the secret of her heart. "We can't care for or love every acquaintance we have."

"Of course not," he agreed, coldly, a sudden chill falling on him, as he put the music on the piano. "Will you begin now?"

She sat down and began:

"The Arrow to the Quiver," &c.

But somehow or other she sang in a lifeless, unemotional style, very different from her usual pretty way, and the young man did not ask her to sing again, only, after saying his mother hoped she would come over to the Abbey and see them soon, left with a very formal adieu and hand-shake.

"What an ass I am!" he muttered, angrily, as he strode through the garden. "She doesn't care a bit about me."

"I hope I haven't offended him," murmured Brownie, watching his retreating figure. "I wonder whether he really is fond of me. It wouldn't do to let him think I cared for him, and then have him laugh at me. I would rather suffer anything than that humiliation."

Poor Brownie! She was bound to suffer, and she often in after days looked back on those past golden hours with keen regret.

CHAPTER III.

"Her face was like a summer night,
All flooded with a dusky light,
She could whisper, and smile and sigh,
Pleading, flattering, so can the rest;
But oh! the light in her roving eye
Would have wiled the babe from its mother's breast."

THE next day passed somewhat slowly and dully at Whitebrook.

Cyril had not appeared, and after dinner Brownie gave up all hope of seeing him, and settled herself beside her mother in the drawing-room and began working diligently at the mantel-board she was embroidering and which she meant to present to Jenny Cliff on her twenty-first birthday.

She felt a little sad, a little depressed, she hardly knew why, or perhaps she would not own to herself that it was that small, dark shadow that had fallen between her and Cyril the day before that changed her life from sunlight to gloom.

So she worked on diligently while her mother read, and was so absorbed in her work that she did not hear the sound of wheels on the gravelled drive, and jumped up in surprise when the maid threw open the door and announced "Lady Surtees," while Mrs. Barrington rose hastily, and went forward to greet her guest.

The weather was warm, almost sultry, yet the traveller wore a large cape-like boa, of rare Russian sable, over her shoulders, the ends of which fell to the hem of the grey cloth dress she wore, that fitted her like a glove.

Mrs. Barrington had said she was aristocratic and she was more than that.

Tall, finely formed, and supremely graceful, she held herself like a princess.

Her neck was long and slim, and supported a small head, crowned with a mass of rippling blue-black hair; her features were classically straight, her chin dimpled, exquisitely carved lips, large brown eyes, fringed with long black lashes, and overarched ebon brows, while her skin was cream-white, without the faintest tinge of colour in the cheeks. Indeed so fair and colourless was her skin and so classical her features, that she looked more like a statue than a living woman.

"Alianore! I did not expect you before to-morrow," exclaimed Mrs. Barrington, taking her cousin's hand and pressing it warmly.

"I hope I have not taken you by surprise to the extent of putting you out, and finding my rooms not ready!" she said in very sweet but languid tones.

"No; fortunately your rooms were got ready to-day. Only we have dined and I have no doubt you are famishing."

"Not at all. I managed to get some tea and refreshment at Taunton, so a cup of tea now, and a modest slice of bread-and-butter will suffice."

"That is very little to require. This is my daughter, Alianore," indicating the girl who stood near her silently watching the new arrival intently.

"So this is Hester!" remarked her ladyship, taking the girl's hand and studying her pretty *mignonne* face closely, for she always saw in a younger woman a possible rival, and being of an intensely vain and selfish nature, she could not brook that. "I have often heard about you, child."

"And I of you," said Brownie.

"Really! You are very pretty, my dear," with a condescending air and manner.

"And you are lovely," exclaimed the girl impatiently.

"What a charming compliment!" laughed the beauty, "and one I can believe, too, as it comes from feminine lips."

"Do you know, Hester, in the world in which I have lived, women don't pay each other compliments; they only say nasty, spiteful things, and are envious and jealous of each other's good-looks, never admitting anyone is beautiful—save themselves."

"It is better to speak the truth, to say what one means; I always do."

"You are only a child," returned Lady Surtees, half mockingly.

"You don't understand that it would be impossible in society to say what one means. We can't live in a palace of truth. We should make heaps of enemies and do ourselves no good. It is much better to have tact than truth."

"What a dreadful thing to say!" cried Brownie, with widely opened eyes.

"You won't think so when you have seen and studied the world as I have. When you are my age—by the way, Jane, how old is she?"

"Just eighteen. You are exactly double her age, Alianore."

"Ah, indeed! Time passes so rapidly," and her ladyship's delicate brows drew into a frown,

for she did not care for anybody to know that she was nearing forty. She was still so beautiful, time had dealt so leniently with her, tracing no lines about the lustrous eyes or rosy lips, leaving the skin as clear and soft as in girlhood, that she knew she might knock eight or ten years off her age, and pose as a young matron, and she didn't hesitate about doing it. Now, here, as this girl knew her age, and would probably blab about it, she would have to be careful, therefore she frowned, and languidly said she was tired, and would like to go to her room for the purpose of ablution before having her cup of tea, and Mrs. Barrington took her up to the pretty daintily-decorated room that looked so sweet and clean, and smelt so deliciously of lavender, and that appeared so small and insignificant to the woman who was used to big mansions and noble men's seats.

However, she made no remark, and with the help of her maid, a sallowed-faced Parisienne, she doffed her sables and travelling dress, and got into a tea-gown of thick white material, with a Greek pattern in gold embroidered on it, which became her admirably, and, thrusting her feet into a pair of slippers of similar material she descended to the dining-room where supper had been laid in the meantime, and, despite her protestations of want of appetite, etc., made havoc in a cold chicken, and a gooseberry fool, and took three or four glasses of sherry, besides claret and whisky, which made Brownie open her eyes, for in all her life she had never seen any woman take so much, and it seemed so incongruous to see this woman, who looked like a princess, who was dainty in appearance, delicate and refined, eating and drinking voraciously with the appetite of a trooper.

Nevertheless, she fascinated the girl, chained her glance as a serpent might, for every action was graceful, and her beauty was of that type that attracts and chains the attention.

"I wonder what Cyril will think of her," she wondered, and as if in answer to her thought of him Lady Surtees asked, "Who is your nearest neighbour?"

"Mrs. Sutherland, of Creech Abbey," replied Jane Barrington.

"Sutherland, Sutherland," she repeated, reflectively. "I seem to know the name."

"Anne Hetherington married Rochdale Sutherland. You remember Anne Hetherington, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, of course. She was more your companion than mine. Indeed, I only just remember her. She was a good deal older than either of us."

"Four-and-twenty years older than you are, Alianore."

"Really, quite an antiqua. Is her husband still alive?"

"No, he died five years ago."

"Lucky woman!" sighed the baronet's wife, and Brownie stared all the harder at this remark, and Mrs. Barrington looked confused.

"She is a rich widow, then?"

"Yes."

"Any family?"

"One son."

"Conceited and spoiled, I suppose?"

"No; why?"

"He must be the catch of the county. All the girls must run after and court him," and her ladyship's keen eyes travelling round lighted on Brownie's blushing face, and she said, a trifle maliciously, "Are you one of the huntresses, Hester? Do you chase this golden quarry?"

"Certainly not," replied Miss Barrington, curtly, holding her pretty head high in the air and looking absolutely savage, for it occurred to her for the first time that Cyril was rich, and that people might attribute her liking for him to the knowledge that his purse was well-filled, and that he would therefore be a most desirable *parti*.

These thoughts filled her with hot indignation and shame, made her feel terribly angry against the languid, smiling woman who had hinted at her motives with regard to young Sutherland not being quite disinterested.

"I am sure I shall hate her, mother," she gasped, when their guest had retired to rest.

"My dear, you mustn't say that," reproved Mrs. Barrington, gently.

"I can't help it. She is dreadful though so pretty looking. It was quite shocking the way she spoke of her husband, as though she wished him dead, and envied Mrs. Sutherland because she is free."

"She didn't mean that, I am sure."

"I think she did, and I am certain she is spiteful."

"My dear child, go to bed, and don't think about your cousin; she won't be with us always," and thus admonished, Brownie went up slowly to her room, and cried herself to sleep, feeling that her childish days of joy and hope were over for ever, and that a snake had crept into her paradise.

CHAPTER IV.

"Death could not sever my soul and you,
As these have severed your soul and me."

LADY SURTEES did not appear at the early breakfast next morning, much to Brownie's delight. The sallow-faced maid took her a cup of coffee and a roll at nine o'clock, while the others discussed their meal in the cool dining-room where the long French windows stood open, letting in the balmy breeze laden with the scents of summer, and could chat freely and unconstrainedly, untrammelled by the presence of a third person, and that person a highly unsympathetic one.

Brownie ran out with her dog and in the delight of chasing him, and picking flowers in the woods, she forgot all about their unwelcome guest, so it was rather a shock to her when she came in about luncheon time to see her ladyship lying languidly on the sofa in the small drawing-room, her white draperies arranged with a due regard to effect, a big palm leaf in her hand, and Cyril sitting by her side talking animatedly.

The girl stood as though turned to stone just within the window, the lace curtains framing her dark, dainty head, the colour coming and going uncertainly in her cheeks, her breathing short and sharp.

"Ah, Hester," smiled Alianore, "so you have come back from your rambles in the wood. Really, child, you ought to take a sunshade. Your face is terribly burnt. You look like a gipsy. Your friend Mr. Sutherland was very wise to take my advice, and not go out in that grilling sun. It is very much nicer in here, is it not?" she added, turning her lovely eyes on him.

"It is very cool," he returned constrainedly as he rose, and shook hands with Brownie, the coolest greeting they had ever had, though his gaze sought hers rather eagerly, a strange questioning look in his blue orbs.

"I am glad you find it pleasant," said the girl, quickly, a hot, unreasoning anger at her heart at the close proximity of the man she looked upon as her sweetheart to lovely, fascinating Alianore Surtees.

"We have found it delightful," said her cousin with greater animation than she had yet displayed, "at least I have. Of course I can't answer for Mr. Sutherland," with a winning smile straight up into his face.

"It has been very pleasant," he was obliged to admit out of courtesy to Lady Surtees, only he would very much rather not have been obliged to admit it with the girl's dark sorrowful eyes upon him.

"I have no doubt it has been," she agreed dryly. "I don't see how it could be anything else."

"Nor I," cried Lady Surtees. "Mr. Sutherland has been most entertaining. Has given me several bits of local news, told me some things that have astonished me greatly" (Brownie wondered what they were, and whether they had anything to do with herself), "and verbally made me acquainted with his mother, and Miss Cliff, whom I hope to meet in the flesh soon."

"My mother will come and call on you soon, of course," said the young man politely.

"It will be very kind of her," rejoined her ladyship with a well-bred smile. "I shall be enchanted to resume my acquaintance with her."

"She will be equally pleased, I am sure."

"Where is mother?" asked Brownie, angry past endurance at these polite platitudes. "Luncheon is ready."

"She went to the rose-garden a short time ago."

"I will go and fetch her."

"No, let me," and before Brownie could stop him Cyril sprang through the window and disappeared.

"Joan, your Darby is very handsome," said Alianore with a little mocking smile that made the girl's blood boil, as the young man departed.

"What do you mean?" she asked abruptly, a frown disfiguring her *mignonne* face.

"Cyril Sutherland is a splendid man, then, if you will have it put into plain English. I have seldom seen a finer."

"Really," said Brownie sarcastically. "Then he will do for you to flirt with and keep your hand in while you are here."

"Very nicely. Only I shouldn't like to take him from you," replied her cousin, a malicious gleam in her brown eyes, a sneer on her lovely lips.

"He is nothing to me, so don't have any scruple on that score," replied the girl, with pale cheeks and compressed mouth.

"Then I won't. I'll amuse myself to the top of my bent," and she kept her word.

During the days that followed, bright summer days, she managed, with consummate skill, to chain the young man to her side, never giving him an opportunity of seeing Brownie alone, and throwing out hints to the effect that she was mercenary, and was "spooney" on a cousin of her husband's, Wilfrid Wilmington by name, an extremely handsome young man with a large fortune, pleasant manners, a clever brain, and a good temper—in fact, possessing almost every quality to make him a favourite with the fair sex, and beloved by them.

He had taken a fancy to Creech, and was staying at the "Blue Dragon," a comfortable old hostelry there, and every day he found his way to Whitebrook, and occasionally to the Abbey, where he would have wished to pass all his time, for the fact was he fancied Jenny Cliff immensely, and told himself she was just the sort of girl to suit him. There was no nonsense about her. She was thoroughly genuine and straightforward, and, above all, she knew nearly the whole of the dry-as-dust old books that she loved as well as he did himself, and could quote from them with the same fluency as he could, and that was delightful. Moreover, she knew Greek and Latin perfectly, and could set him straight in a Persian or Syrian quotation, altogether being a perfect epitome of knowledge, and he would dearly have loved to marry her and carry her off to his old Manse in the Highlands where there was a library replete with scientific works and fusty old tomes.

But there was one or two drawbacks to his wooing. In the first place, Jenny seemed supremely unconscious of his tender feeling for her; in the second place, he did not like to go often to Creech Abbey, for young Sutherland was barely civil to him, and seemed to intimate plainly that his room was preferred to his company.

This was hardly surprising, seeing that Lady Surtees had impressed upon Cyril that Wilfrid was dying for love of Brownie, and that she was eager to become mistress of his ample fortune, and she put a further stopper on Wilfrid's wooing of Jenny by telling him that Miss Barrington was in love with him, and that he was acting very badly in not proposing to her.

"I don't think she does care for me," he found courage to say one day when Alianore was urging him to propose.

"Yes, she does," replied his companion confidently.

"I don't see why she should," he objected, for Miss Barrington's manner towards him hardly suggested that was dying of love for him, though she had laughed and talked with him, and shown greater friendliness towards him than she would otherwise have done to hide the grief she felt for Cyril's defection, Cyril who was always at Lady Surtees's side, and appeared to have eyes and ears

for no one else, who was devotion itself, and was openly encouraged by the fair grass-widow.

"No, I don't see why she should," he repeated, doggedly.

"My dear Wilfrid, is your heart and soul and mind so given over to your old books that you haven't time to look in the glass?"

"What are you driving at now, Allanore?"

"You are an extremely handsome man."

"It is very good of you to say so, but I am not the only good-looking fellow in the world."

"I am aware of that. Still, you may be the only one for her."

"For instance, there's Sutherland. He is younger than I am, quite as well off, a better figure, and a cheerier, merrier disposition. It's just as likely that she cares for him, more especially as he's an old friend."

"Pooh! Rubbish! You are the one she loves."

"How do you know?"

"By a hundred different signs. She was looking sad before you came, and she brightened up wonderfully after I introduced you for a while. Now she is looking miserable again because you neglect her."

"I neglect her!" cried Wilmington. "Why I am at Whitebrook nearly every day."

"That doesn't signify. You are not here as much as you were at first."

"I didn't know Miss Cliff then," he admitted.

"I know that, and I think it is nothing short of disgraceful the way you have acted towards Hester, poor child! Most ungentlemanly!"

"Really, Allanore, if you think I have committed myself, if you think I ought to, of course I will propose to Miss Barrington."

"I certainly think you ought to," replied her ladyship decidedly, for she feared the rivalry of the girl whose life she was doing her best to ruin with that devilish cleverness which comes to a jealous lost woman, and helps her abominable plots and schemes."

"Then I suppose I must," he said, rather dolefully. "Though I really can't understand it. Now, if it were Jenny Cliff——"

"Well, you see, it isn't Jenny Cliff, it's Hester Barrington," interrupted her ladyship, "and she is in the summer-house in the rose-garden now. Take my advice, go and propose to her at once, and be a happy man."

"Very well," groaned her cousin, moving off with lagging steps in the direction of the summer-house, and wishing with all his heart that it was Jenny there instead of Brownie, while Lady Surtees hastened off to the house to meet Cyril, whom she expected that afternoon, not wishing to lose one minute in the society of the man who had become perilously dear to her.

The cold proud heart that had never responded to any man's wooing before, burned like lava in her breast at the mere thought of him. She adored, worshipped him. She loved every turn of his head, every movement of the strong white hands, every ring and variation of the pleasant, manly voice. She simply idolized his perfect physical beauty; the thick wavy fair hair, the straight features, the sun-tanned, glowing complexion, the sunny blue eyes, with their curtain of long, black lashes, the handsome mouth, over which the heavy, tawny moustache drooped with a curve like the sweep of a bird's wing. He was so charming, so fascinating, so likely to attract a woman's fancy, and above all, so different from her bald-headed, red faced, elderly, gouty husband, whom she had married, not from affection, but simply for what he could give her.

She looked upon him as a banker who could supply all her extravagant wants and whims, and regarded only her worldly advancement in the matter.

With Cyril Sutherland it had been quite different. The first time she saw him in the little cool, shady drawing-room at Whitebrook a sudden, sharp, half-sweet pain, a queer sensation, a mad moment of bewildering conflicting emotions, made her heart beat furiously, and her head whirl. That day formed an epoch in her life. She felt with Elaine, that she might say,—

"I have gone mad—I love you—let me die!"

She seemed unable to resist the wild passion that had seized on her. She forgot the immeasurable gulf that lay between her and this man whom she loved, not wisely, but too well. She forgot the crime of it, the misery it would inevitably entail on her, and probably would on him.

She ignored the fact that he was Brownie's lover, which she knew was the case, from hints simple Jane Barrington had given. She forgot her husband, everything save the one great, overpowering fact that she loved Cyril Sutherland, a man ten years her junior, a man who hitherto had never given a thought to any woman save the guileless, innocent girl he had hoped to make his wife, and Lady Surtees, with wicked ingenuity, managed to keep the lovers apart.

Poor Brownie thought he was fascinated by this splendid beauty, who had queened it regally at the Russian Court, who was very different from a quiet little country girl, who had nothing to recommend her but a dimpled baby face, that sank into absolute insignificance beside the maturer and more refined charms of her cousin.

She remembered his saying women of the world were amusing, and didn't hurt his susceptibilities, and Allanore artfully insinuated that her frank truthfulness was disagreeable to him; that he liked more refinement and polish than she possessed; that she was an ignorant little country wench, and that he thought so.

Altogether, she managed to poison the girl's mind, to fill her heart with a hundred dreadful doubts of the young lover she had always implicitly believed in, and as though the powers of evil wished to aid her abominable schemes, Wilfrid Wilmington came to Creech just then, and Brownie, knowing Allanore watched her, and longed for some sign of the misery that was consuming her, resolutely hid her grief, resolving that she should not have an open triumph over her, so laughed and talked feverishly with Wilmington, and encouraged his little meaningless attentions on all occasions, thereby confirming in Cyril's mind the tales Lady Surtees told him of the engagement that was about to take place between her two young cousins, filling his heart with a mighty despair; for the one pure true love of his life was given to Brownie Barrington.

He knew he could never care for any woman again as he had for her, and he marvelled greatly at the sudden change in her demeanour towards him, and was fain to believe Lady Surtees when she declared it was caused by her affection for Wilmington.

He remembered, with a bitter sinking of the heart, that she had once told him she "could not care for every acquaintance," and he reluctantly concluded that that was all he was to her.

A few words would have set matters straight between the young people, but her ladyship was careful that there should be no opportunity for those words to be spoken.

When Cyril was at Whitebrook she chained him to her side, kept him captive by every artifice in her power, and as Wilmington was generally strolling about the garden with Brownie, or at the piano, hanging over her, listening to her sweet notes, it was not possible for them to exchange confidences, and after a while a barrier of distrust and coldness grew up between them that parted them more effectually than anything else could.

CHAPTER V.

"For everything created
In the bounds of earth and sky,
Hath such longing to be mated,
It must couple or must die.
The wind of heaven beguiles the leaf,
The rose invites the bee,
The sickle hugs the barley-sheaf,
And I love thee.
By night and day, in joy and grief,
Do thou love me?"

Lady Surtees found young Sutherland idly turning over the leaves of a photograph album, and welcomed him warmly.

"I began to think you were never coming," she told him, with one of her false, brilliant smiles, as she held out both jewelled hands to him, which he was constrained to take, yet looked rather as though he would have preferred not doing so.

"Did you? Why?" he asked, a little indifferently, his eyes wandering away from her handsome, passionate face to the garden, as though seeking for something or some one.

"You said you were coming early."

"Well! It is only four o'clock now."

"I expected you at two."

"I did not say I was coming at that time!"

"No. Still, you generally do, and it has seemed an age to me since."

"Has it really?"

There was a ring of astonishment in his voice, and his eyes settled on her face with a strange, inquiring look in their blue depths.

"It has, indeed."

"I wonder why?"

Cyril was still young enough, and unspoiled enough, not to think that every woman who looked at him was in love with him, and it had not occurred to him that brilliant, beautiful Lady Surtees was mad about him. He thought she liked admiration and homage as any lovely woman might, but that she was devoured by a guilty passion for him, that she had forgotten duty, self-repect, and her husband, he did not understand, and therefore showed his surprise plainly.

He never for an instant thought her clearly-shown preference for his society was anything more than a vain woman's love of admiration, and a desire to show the world that she was still fair and young enough to attract men to her side, and that her empire as a beauty was not on the wane. Had he known the truth he would have considered every moment spent in her society was a wrong to the man whose name she bore, whose ring she wore, an emblem of those bonds she would willingly have cast aside now that she was bewitched by Cyril Sutherland.

However, he did not know it. He was so miserable at the change in Brownie that he had not stopped to analyse Lady Surtees' actions. He simply let himself glide with the stream during those bright summer weeks that had been full of dreamy pain to him, a pain which the handsome coquette's wiles and flatteries had dulled perhaps a little.

"I wonder why?" he said.

"Because I enjoy your society so much," she told him with startling earnestness.

"It is very good of you to say so," he returned somewhat stiffly. "I am quite flattered."

"It is not flattery. The simple truth only. You are different from the ordinary run of young men, who are nothing but coxcombs, empty-pated fools who bore one to death in the space of an hour with their foolish frivolities and intense conceit."

"You are rather hard on the golden youth of the present day, Lady Surtees."

"Not harder than they deserve. They are terribly stupid; no originality about them. Now, that is why I like you. You are original, have some topics to talk on, and talk well on them and cleverly."

"You must have met many clever men at St. Petersburg."

"A few; but the Muscovites are terribly plain, and I worship physical beauty."

"An evanescent thing to worship," he said, slowly.

"Perhaps; yet I like a handsome face as much as I do a beautiful picture. I could look at you for hours."

"Indeed!"

There was a note of displeasure and warning in his voice, but the infatuated woman did not heed it.

"Yes. You are perfectly handsome."

"Really, Lady Surtees, you will make me quite conceited," he said, trying to treat it as a joke.

"No; you are not the kind of man to be conceited. I wonder if anything ever would make you conceited?"

"I hope not. I think a man must be a consummate ass to overprize a good-looking face, which time and age are sure to line, wither and distort into something unlovely and repulsive."

"Oh don't say that," she cried impulsively laying one slender white hand on his arm. "I can't bear to think that my skin will become

yellow and wrinkled, my mouth toothless, my eyes dim, my hair white. It would be horrible!" with a gesture of disgust.

"Sir Reginald would love you all the same," said Cyril, soothingly.

"My husband! Do not talk to me of my husband; I cannot bear it from you," said the misguided woman passionately. "I want to forget that he exists, if I can."

"I am sorry I offended you," said her companion, coldly, as he rose to his feet, by so doing dislodging the hand that rested on his arm. "Do you know where Brow—Miss Barrington is?"

"In the garden."

"In the garden?" he repeated, "I do not see her there!"

"Possibly not," replied her ladyship, a malicious sparkle in her fine eyes, "nevertheless, she is there."

"How do you know?"

"I saw her there a little while ago."

"She may not be there now."

"She is, and, moreover, she has a companion. One very much to her liking, too."

"What do you mean?"

The young man swung round and faced his companion as he spoke, an angry light glittering in his blue eyes.

"I mean that she is in the summer-house with Wilfrid Wilmington, listening to a proposal of marriage from him."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Cyril, white to the lips with the sudden storm of jealous agony that swept over him.

"It is not in the least impossible," retorted Allanore, quickly. "It is an actual fact!"

"I—I can't believe—it!" he muttered, brokenly.

"Can't you? Then come with me and I will give you proof positive," and laying her hand on his arm she led her unresisting victim out to the garden, and took him by a by-path to the summer-house.

Meanwhile Wilfrid's reluctant feet had conducted him to the quaint little rose-covered structure in the garden, where Brownie lounged in a *chaise longue* trying to read a novel and thinking regretfully of those vanished golden days before Allanore Surtees came to Whitebrook and spoiled all her young life with her cruel, baneful influence.

"Am I disturbing you, Miss Barrington?" asked Wilfrid, in an embarrassed way, quite foreign to his usual easy manner of genial friendship.

"Not at all," she replied, looking up at him with a faint smile. "I am only looking over a very stupid novel."

"What is it called?" taking the book from her hand.

"'A Heart Betrayed,'" she said, languidly.

"What a very sentimental title," he laughed. "Somewhat out of date too, isn't it? Hearts are not often betrayed nowadays, are they?"

"Sometimes," she answered, a sharp thrill of pain running through her as she thought of Cyril's defection and evident devotion to Lady Surtees.

"I didn't think people owned to having any now. I thought they were out of fashion."

"Did you?"

The once bright laughing eyes looked at him mournfully, and he remembering her ladyship's words felt a twinge of self-reproach, thinking himself the cause of that sad glance.

"Yes. Have you a heart, Miss Barrington?"

"I had one once," she responded, with a sigh.

"And not now?"

"No, not now," with a deeper sigh.

"You gave it away?"

"Yes," nodding the brown, curly head.

"My dear child," he said, assuming a paternal gravity of manner, "was it not rather unwise to give it away unasked?"

"Perhaps so," she agreed, sorrowfully, thinking that Cyril never had actually asked her to bestow her heart on him, though he had said a thousand fond and endearing things to her. "Only—I—thought——"

"Thought what?" queried Wilfrid, as she paused hesitatingly.

"That—that——"

"He," he suggested, taking one of her pretty little brown hands and patting it gently.

"Yes, that he did care for me—and—and—wanted it."

"And now?" he asked, rather breathlessly.

"Now I am sure he doesn't," she returned, mournfully, with such a white, woebegone face that Wilmington told himself he was a brute, and braced himself to speak the fatal words and set things straight with her.

"Perhaps you are wrong," he suggested, quietly.

"I am sure I am not."

"Why?"

"A woman's instinct seldom deceives her in a case of this kind," she rejoined resignedly.

"But, suppose I tell you that you are—wrong—that—that"—with a desperate effort and a rueful thought of Jenny and her erudition—"he cares for you, wants you to—to become his—wife, what then?"

"Oh, how I should bless you," she cried, her eyes sparkling, her face radiant with joy, instinct with happiness, stretching out her other hand to him, which he took and held tenderly, and thought after all that it wouldn't be such a hard fate to be the husband of such a fair, winsome young creature. "I have been so—so wretched and miserable."

"Well, don't be wretched any longer," he said, soothingly. "Let me make you happy. Be my wife."

"Your wife?" she echoed, in amazement, recoiling from him as though he had struck her.

"Yes—I—I," beginning to stammer under her almost horrified gaze; "I believe—I have been told that—that—that you honour me by—by liking me!"

"So I do," she said, recovering from her amazement. "I like you very, very much. I am sure you are a very good man, and I have seen so much of you lately, and, being connected with my cousin, I have looked upon you as a relative, too. And—and you were so kind just now, and I have been so miserable that I have said more than I ought to have. But I can never be your wife."

"You really mean that?" he asked, hugely relieved.

"Yes, and—and may I say something?"

"Yes, anything you like."

"Then I thought it was my friend, Jenny Cliff, that you liked."

"To tell the truth, Brownie—I may call you Brownie now, mayn't I?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"I do care for Miss Cliff more than I have ever cared for any other woman in my life."

"Then what on earth made you propose to me?" inquired his companion, her eyes round with astonishment.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Allanore thought I ought to."

"Allanore!"

"Yes; she said I had paid you so much attention before I saw Miss Cliff that couldn't do anything else as a gentleman."

"I see," remarked Brownie, drily, fathoming some of her cousin's motives in the matter.

"You will forgive me, won't you?" he pleaded.

"Of course I will," she answered, readily, smiling at him kindly; "and wish you success in your wooing of Jenny."

"Thank you. Your good wishes give me courage and hope," and, taking her hand, he lifted it to his lips.

It was just at this minute that Lady Surtees brought Cyril to the arbour door; and he, seeing Brownie flushed and smiling, and Wilmington in the act of kissing her hand, concluded that his rival was accepted; and the girl, encountering his eyes, shivered at the cold, stern expression in them, and became deathly white, while her ladyship indulged in a wicked smile of triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

"Then lonely I'll wed with my sorrow,
Dead branch on a desolate tree,
My night hath no hope of a morrow,
Unless she come over to me.
Love takes no denial, and pity
Is love in the second degree,
So long are I'd ended my ditty,
The maiden come over to me."

It was the night of Jenny Cliff's coming-of-age ball.

Creech Abbey was a blaze of light from garret to basement; carriages kept rolling up the gravelled drive and depositing gaily-dressed damsels and diamond-decked dowagers at its grim portal.

The whole neighbourhood had been in a state of fever about it for weeks past, and the feminine world in no end of a flutter, for rumour said the Duke of Highgate was to be there, the Earl of Hampstead, two or three baronets, and a half-score of knights, so the bouncing, fast Misses Pringle were resplendent in white and red costumes. Mrs. Smith, the vicar's wife, had had her wedding gown, some twenty years of age, dyed and re-made, Miss Malcolm, the oldest maid of Creech, had painted her face and blacked her eyes, and hidden her bald patch under a wreath of flowers, and tried to still her palsied old head that wagged incessantly like a mandarin's, while Lady Flinders had actually been up to town and purchased a bright new auburn wig, that made her ghastly wrinkled face look more ghastly by contrast, and she sat near the maiden lady of doubtful age, and chattered her jaws and listened while the other wagged her wicked old head and talked scandal.

There was a contingent of the military from the new barracks at Klint, five miles from Creech, belonging to a regiment lately returned from India, and most of the officers had impaired livers and a terrible craving for brandy-pawnee, and their faces rivalled Lady Flinders' yellow countenance in colour.

Miss Cliff, with the most unconcerned air in the world, stood beside Mrs. Sutherland receiving their guests.

She had had two seasons in town, very much against her will, with an eminent leader of fashion, wife of a cabinet minister, who received at her house none but the best people. She was, therefore, well able to school her lips to a stereotyped smile, to say the right thing at the right time, and to hide the weariness she felt at the whole affair.

She was looking very well, for Mrs. Sutherland's maid had been allowed, for once in a way, to dress her abundant light hair in a fluffy and becoming fashion; her dress was by Elise, and was a perfect model of the dressmaker's art, adding grace and hiding defects, and, save for her hopelessly freckled skin, and light lashed eyes, she might have passed for a good-looking girl.

The second valse was being played as the party from Whitebrook arrived. Wilfrid Wilmington was with them, and Jim Barrington, whose ship had arrived at Plymouth the day before, and who escorted his mother with an air of pride and tenderness.

Allanore Surtees was looking splendidly handsome in a trailing robe of white satin, brocaded with silver roses, the delicate lace that draped it being fastened with real crimson roses, and diamond stars that shone and glinted also amid the coils of her black hair, and round her white throat and arms.

Brownie looked like a little dusky bird beside a gorgeous silver pheasant. She was very pale, and there were dark circles under the pretty brown eyes. She wore a tulle costume of a pale yellow colour, looped with poppies, and a set of quaint gold ornaments that looked well on her clear, warm skin.

The first person on whom her eyes fell was Cyril, and, even in the midst of her own misery, she noted how worn and haggard he looked, what hard lines there were about mouth and brow, what a hopeless look in the once sunny, laughing eyes, and she put it down to remorse and regret for his guilty passion for another man's wife.

He did not ask her to dance, but secured Lady

Surtees' programme, while Wilmington obtained Miss Cliff's, and scored up largely on it, while Jim brought up some of the military contingent whom he knew to his sister, and then went off to seek a certain young lady who was like a delicate piece of Dresden china in her dainty fairness, and who had bewitched him three years before.

Brownie tried to talk merrily to her partners—tried to appear gay and happy—but her heart was like lead in her bosom, and she felt much more inclined to cry than to smile.

After a while she grew tired of the music and dancing, the merry laughter and joyful badinage, and crept away to a little room at the end of the corridor, which she knew would be vacant.

The long French windows were open. The heavy scent of roses and languorous perfume of lilies floated in.

The cool air seemed to invite her to go out. It was so hot in the house.

She felt feverish and restless, and, indifferent to the fact that she had nothing on her shoulders and arms, she stepped out on the balcony, and stood leaning against the balustrade, dreamily watching the star-spangled sky.

She had been there some time when she was startled by the sound of a familiar voice coming from the room. It was Lady Surtees', and, starting forward, she saw her standing by Cyril's side, looking up at him with all her mad, unholy passion shining in her eyes.

Brownie stood as though turned to stone, crouched in the shadow of the wall. The power of volition seemed to leave her, and every word that was said struck distinctly on her shrinking ear.

"Yes, I love you," her ladyship was saying, "with all my heart and soul and strength."

"Lady Surtees!" exclaimed Sutherland, amazedly.

"Don't pretend to be shocked," she went on, half-mockingly. "I know how wrong it is."

"It is worse than wrong," he interrupted, sternly.

"Let it be as bad as it can," she retorted, sullenly, "I cannot help it."

"You should help it. Think of your husband."

"No, I will not think of him!" she cried, furiously. "I loathe, abhor, detest him! What is he to me? A drag, a clog; a torture to me, for he stands between me and my happiness. Oh, Cyril!" she went on, frantically, clasping her hands round his arm in her desperate earnestness, "do not let the tie that binds me to a man I detest separate us. Do not let it stand in the way of our happiness—our mutual joy!"

"You do not know what you are saying. For Heaven's sake calm yourself!"

"Calm myself! How can I be calm when I am with you? My blood runs like lava through my veins. My pulses beat like sledge-hammers. My brain whirls. I am mad—mad!"

"I think you must be," muttered her companion.

"Take me away, Cyril," she went on, her breast heaving stormily, the diamonds on it flashing and sparkling at each hurried respiration, "take me away. I can never go back to Reginald. I will give up all for you, willingly—joyfully."

"Lady Surtees, you are mistaken," he said in cold, decisive tones that struck like the blow of a knife on the wretched, guilty woman's heart. "I do not love you, and I have not the slightest intention in the world of doing your husband an injury by running away with you."

"You do not love me!" she gasped, her face paling to a ghastly grey hue.

"No, I am not a scoundrel. I do not make love to other men's wives. You have mistaken the attentions I have shown you."

"I have indeed," she said, bitterly, loosening her hold on his arm, and speaking slowly and with difficulty. "For—whom—then—do you care?"

"I thought you knew," he said, throwing a keen glance at her agonised ashy face.

"No," she replied, faintly; "you have not made me the confidante of your love affairs."

"The only woman I ever have loved or ever can love," he said coldly and somewhat cruelly, "is Brownie Barrington."

"Ah!" she wrung her hands in silence, for the cup of her terrible shame and humiliation was full. To have offered herself to this man like a wanton, and then to be told that he loved another!

"Let me order a carriage for you," he suggested, a touch of pity mingling with his indignation as he noted her anguish. "You will not care to go back to the ball-room."

"No; I shall not care to go back there. Get me a carriage as soon as you can," and declining his proffered arm, she rose and swept out of the room beside him, and ten minutes later was driving back to Whitebrook in the carriage of a late arrived guest, while Cyril was threading his way back to the ball-room, full of perplexity and sorrow for the miserable woman whom he had just seen drive away, and for himself, because he believed Brownie was engaged to Wilmington.

The ball-room seemed to have overflowed, for here and there, in convenient nooks and corners, were couples flirting and enjoying themselves immensely. The young master of the Abbey cannoned against a gentleman with a lady on his arm in the corridor, and stopping to apologise, saw that it was Wilmington.

"Congratulate me, Sutherland," said that individual gleefully; "this lady has consented to make me happy."

Cyril raised his eyes slowly, expecting to see Brownie, and they rested on Jenny Cliff's freckled and blushing face.

"Jenny!" he cried, thoroughly astounded, "is it Jenny you are going to marry?"

"Yes. Why are you so much astonished?"

"I thought it was Brownie," he blurted out in his joy and delight.

"Miss Barrington does not care for me," said Wilfrid significantly, "though I was told she did."

"Who told you that?" asked Sutherland sternly.

"Lady Surtees."

"Ah! I understand."

And like a flash the whole situation revealed itself to his eyes. In her mad infatuation Lady Surtees had hesitated at nothing and had lied and prevaricated all round to separate him from his love.

With a hearty, if silent, imprecation against her ladyship, he made haste to offer his warm congratulations, and then hurried off to look for Brownie. He found her sitting demurely by her mother looking more like his little love of old than she had done for some time. The rich red colour leapt to her cheeks as he stood before her and asked in his usual way for a dance.

"You can have this," she told him, shyly, looking up at him with love-lit eyes, as he towered above her, tall, handsome, strong.

Without a word he put his arm round her waist and swung her away to the voluptuous strains of the valse. When it was over he led her to a cool dim corner of the huge conservatory.

"Brownie," he whispered softly, his lips close to her ear, "will you, can you forgive me?"

"Yes, Cyril," she answered gently, "I can, for it was all a mistake."

"My mistake," he said quickly, "for I ought to have known you would not care for a fellow like Wilmington. It was all my fault."

"Not all, Cyril. I was very jealous of Allanore."

"You had not the slightest cause to be, my pet," he told her very earnestly, possessing himself of both her hands.

"I know that now—for—for Cyril——"

"Yes, my dearest."

"I was out on the balcony when you were in the red room with—her."

"Brownie! then you heard all that unfortunate woman said?"

"Yes. I could not help it. I seemed turned to stone and could not escape."

"Then you know, darling, that I am true to you, yours alone?"

"Yes, and I can't think now, Cyril, how I ever could have doubted you."

"You owe me some reparation for that," he smiled tenderly.

"What shall I do to make up?" she asked, looking at him with a spark of the old mischief gleaming in her gipsy eyes.

"Marry me this day month," he said audaciously, taking her in his arms, and her answer seemed to content him, for he laid his cheek on hers and gave vent to a sigh of intense satisfaction.

[THE END.]

We are inclined to pity the Puritan little one of New England who knows nothing about merry Christmastide, with its rollicking games of blind man's buff, hunt the slipper, snapdragon, and the like, but some of them enjoyed the practice which they called "burning the Christmas candle." This taper was a home-made affair, and differed from other tallow dips only in being larger and having the wick divided at the lower end to form three legs, while at its heart was concealed a quill well filled with gunpowder. On Christmas Eve it was lighted, and the quaint little Puritan folk sat around telling stories and riddles until suddenly the candle went off with a tremendous explosion, making a delightful excitement and giving the children of the colonies their only taste of uproarious holiday fun.

The Sultan of Turkey spends £1 000 a day for his table, and this does not include grand State dinners or other elaborate functions. It is simply his Majesty's everyday *régime*. He takes his meals alone, and not in any particular room, but wherever he happens to be—in the palace, or garden, or private park. Silver dishes, which are sealed up, are used entirely for serving the meals. These are covered with velvet covers to keep the contents warm, and the procession of servants, consisting of perhaps a hundred persons, starts for the spot where the Sultan happens to be. The table, which is of silver, is the first thing borne in the procession. A ladleful of the food from each vessel is first taken by the Imperial Taster; the Grand Chamberlain takes a spoonful, the Sultan watching the operation, and finally commencing his meal.

One of the chief pearl fisheries of the world is that of Thursday Island, which lies eighteen miles from Cape York, the northernmost point of Australia. The population of the whole island is not more than fifteen hundred, a true assembly of the nations, for here are men of every race and colour of the earth. The large majority are, however, Japanese. The pearl fishing is carried on by a fleet of two hundred and thirty "shelling luggers," varying in size from ten to fifteen tons. There are generally seven men to each boat—the diver, the tender, who holds the life line and sees that all is done to insure the safety of the diver, and five men who work the air pump that is placed in the hold of the vessel, and supplies the diver with fresh air. Most of the divers and sailors are Japanese or Malays, few Europeans caring to risk their lives in the work, for it is very dangerous.

The instant the Kaiser hears of some new and important discovery in science, or that a burning controversy is raging on a knotty point in art or literature, the leading professors, and all qualified to speak with authority, are invited to the Palace, in order that the question may be discussed in his presence. The guests assemble at a given hour in the Kaiserin's library, a cosy apartment, the walls of which are lined with literary treasures. On the large table in the centre are laid out in readiness all works of reference, &c., dealing with the subject of the evening, while there are always plenty of atlases and albums containing reproductions from all the galleries and museums in the world. No time is lost in frivolous conversation, the Kaiser almost invariably opening the discussion at once with a pithy query. If demonstrations are to be given those present remain standing, in order to see better; but, as a rule, all are invited to seat themselves, the members of the suite pointing out their places to them. Tea, seltzer-water and beer are handed round at intervals; and generally the Kaiser lights a cigar, but out of consideration for the Kaiserin merely takes a whiff now and then.

ON THE PEKING WALL.

A THRILLING episode of the siege of the legations is described in the December *Century*, by W. N. Pethick, Secretary to Li Hung Chang. Mr. Pethick is an American, and writes from the American point of view:—

On the night of July 3, at the close of the fourteenth day of the siege of the Peking legations, a thrilling incident occurred involving the fate of the Europeans and Americans—a struggle the issue of which was awaited with agonizing suspense by the thousand men, women, and children who would be speedily butchered in case of failure, for the enemy was General Tung Fuhsiang, once a Mahommedan rebel chief, who, with his bloodthirsty horde of bandit soldiers, had sworn to exterminate foreigners, and had now gained a free hand against us in Peking. . . .

At dusk on that evening the Chinese began their final approach by building out from one end of their nearest breastwork a brick wall carrying onward into the bastion to avoid our direct fire, and heading for the end of our barricade; it was really connecting the ends of two hostile breastworks by a semicircular wall. The work was done silently and quickly; bricks were pushed forward from behind cover and piled up without exposing the workers. From their loopholes our men could see this terrible wall grow higher and nearer, and knew that they would soon be exposed to a plunging fire from high above them and from their flank. They felt helpless, and were still under the influence of former panics, which arose from overestimating the value of Chinese soldiers and being too much impressed by mere numbers without courage. They accepted the theory that "the position is untenable"—a phrase with which they had become too familiar from the lips of one of their own officers.

At length, after dark, the reserve rations were brought down into the legation, and it became known that the American position on the wall was to be abandoned. The hour of trial had come. Our dispirited men were about to let go their stronghold. Before morning the whole south wall would be lined with savage enemies, whose musketry would soon be followed by artillery fire raking all the legations from end to end. The terrible fate of hundreds of women and children, of the helpless in the hospital, the aged and feeble, and finally of the thin line of defenders—all this, and the finishing work of the sword, passed through the minds of those who waited without hope.

But the hour produced the man. To Herbert G. Squiers, First Secretary of the United States Legation at Peking, late First Lieutenant of the Seventh United States Cavalry, belongs the merit of saving this deplorable situation. His training in a branch of the army service where promptness and energy are especially necessary, and his two years' careful study of Chinese character and institutions, had fitted him for the needs of this trying time. . . .

For this important service, as well as for the capacity he had shown from the first, Major Sir Claude Macdonald, the British Minister, who had been selected by all the nationalities present here to be commander-in-chief of our little force, paid Mr. Squiers the compliment of appointing him chief of staff. When Sir Claude parted with his staff at the end of the siege, he handed to Mr. Squiers the following letter:—

PEKING, August 18, 1900.

My dear Squiers,—A few lines to thank you most heartily for the excellent and loyal support which you have at all times given me during the siege. That it has been brought to so successful an issue is very largely due to your ability and foresight, and I only hope that if ever I am in a tight hole it may be my good fortune to have so good a man to turn to.

In your son I found a most efficient and gallant A.D.C., whose coolness under fire was the admiration of everybody.

FLOWER OF FATE.

—:o:—

CHAPTER XXII.

"ANICE!" repeated Madge, startled; "is she not in her room?"

"I can find her nowhere, every light is out downstairs. I sent her a note early in the evening to say I should be late, and might perhaps not return till the morning; but I managed to get my business done more quickly than I thought, and then hurried home."

Every nerve in his body was quivering; it went to Madge's heart to see him trembling like a woman.

"You have missed her somewhere," she said, with forced lightness. "I daresay Anice is sitting in one of the bedrooms chatting and forgetting how late it is. I will go and see."

She moved towards the door with a tender smile, but Sir Keith stopped her.

"No, Madge, dear, don't go to these strangers; my pride rebels from letting them see my weakness, and I will not show them that I am scared by such a slight thing as this."

He sank heavily in a chair as he spoke.

"And yet," he went on, slowly; "I have been weighed down all day by the most terrible presentiment of coming sorrow. Worse—shame, try as I would I could not beat it off."

"You are tired, Keith, dear, that is all. Now sit there while I go and find Anice; she can't be very far."

Madge bent and kissed her brother softly; a vague, sharp pain shot through her breast as she saw the dark shadow on his fair, frank face; he clasped her hand and rose.

"No, I will come with you. Perhaps she is with Dunmoor."

They turned away together, and as they reached the door something tried to flit past them with a stifled exclamation.

Sir Keith strode forward and grasped the small black-robed figure by the shoulder.

"Anice!" he said, and his voice sounded stern and hard as iron, "Where have you been? What are you doing here?"

"Keith!" faltered Lady Anice; then as she caught sight of Madge her fear gave way to anger. "How dare you pry on me in this way?" she flashed; "it is disgraceful that you permit it, Keith."

"Madge has not attempted to pry on you, Anice. Answer my question Where have you been? What is the meaning of this hurry and fright?"

"I am not frightened. Don't be so idiotic, Keith. I went down to—to see if you had come home, that's all."

Sir Keith gazed at the pretty craven face; his heart suddenly sickened as he read the lie on every lineament, his hand dropped from her shoulder.

"Go!" he said, in a stifled way; "I shall ask no more questions."

He moved abruptly from her, and before Madge or she could answer, strode hurriedly across the landing to the staircase, his wife gazing after him with a look of horror growing on her face.

"You must not stand there, you will be tired, Anice," Madge was beginning, gently, when Lady Anice, drawing her cloak round her, glided after her husband.

"He must not go, he must not go!" she whispered, in a wild, reckless way.

Madge stood leaning against her door, her heart was beating in a heavy, painful fashion. Doubt, suspicion, fear, crowded her brain; she scarcely knew where she was. Suddenly a confused muffled sound reached her ears; then came a shriek, and then silence.

Madge was paralysed for that instant; a cold perspiration broke out on her brow, her limbs trembled beneath her. Then there seemed to come voices, questions, from every corner, and the landing was crowded with forms.

Lord Dunmoor strode towards Madge.

"What is it?" he asked, hurriedly, seeing her white face.

His answer was given by his sister.

Lady Anice staggered up the stairs, her hands gesticulating wildly, her hair disordered.

"Part them! part them!" she gasped, feebly. "He will be killed! Keith will be——"

The rest faded away in a moan, and, as Madge rushed to clasp her hand, Lady Anice sank to the ground insensible.

Lord Dunmoor, followed by nearly all the frightened guests, ran down the stairs; and Madge, though her blood seemed frozen in her veins, tottered after them, conscious that a low, sneering laugh followed her.

"My revenge has come, Keith Morstoun! come at last!"

The Countess de Ganyani gazed down with a look of triumph at Lady Anice's senseless form, and, as she passed, she slightly spurned it with her foot.

Madge stood clinging to the banisters, conscious that some hideous work was going on round her, but hearing, seeing nothing clearly.

The assembled people were massed round those two forms locked in a deadly struggle.

Strong man as he was, Keith Morstoun was getting the worst of it, for his opponent was cool and collected, while he was mad with shame and misery.

"Morstoun! Keith! for Heaven's sake, man! listen to me! Do you hear!" and Lord Dunmoor gripped his brother-in-law by the arm, and, by almost superhuman strength tore him away.

"What does this mean!" he went on, hurriedly. "Prince, can you give us no explanation? Keith, old fellow, speak!"

The Prince smiled. It was not a pleasant smile, and rearranged his collar.

But it was not he who answered; a woman's voice rang out clearly,—

"Sir Keith is avenging his wife's honour. The Prince cannot deny he is Lady Anice's most favoured lover."

The blood rushed to Lord Dunmoor's face, the veins on his forehead swelled, his hand gripped Keith's arm convulsively.

"Woman, you lie!" he muttered, hoarsely.

Sir Keith seemed suddenly dazed; he dropped into a chair, his head sunken on his breast like an old man.

With a broken sob Madge left the stairs and knelt beside him.

"Lie! Oh, no, Lord Dunmoor! I am speaking the truth! Where have your eyes been, man, that you have not seen it before! It has been common talk these weeks past!"

Madge rose suddenly to her feet.

"Are you a woman, or a fiend," she said, in a voice, choked with emotion, "that you should glory like this in another's shame! Lord Dunmoor, go to your sister, she needs your aid. Pity her, as I do, for what was she but a tool in the hands of these adventurers! You, madam prepare to leave the house at once!"

She turned to the group of servants hustled in a corner, and spoke to the butler,—

"Collins, see that a carriage is got ready at once. Send some of the maids up to assist the Countess de Ganyani."

"I do not intend to leave till morning," cried the Countess, boldly.

"You go now, without an instant's delay," was Madge's answer, given quietly, "or the servants shall drive you from the house you have desecrated too long with your presence."

The Prince stood silent, his eyes full of admiration and fire at the dignity in this slender girl.

A smile of contempt passed over his face as he saw his confederate pale before the menacing looks of the servants, and then pass rapidly up the stairs.

Madge turned, as the Countess disappeared, to the rest of the guests,—

"Pray retire!" she said, with a very faint smile. "You must all be tired. Everything will be quiet now for the night, I trust!"

One of the ladies held out her hand, sympathetically.

"Let me stay with you, my dear," she said.

But Madge shook her head.

"You are very good! We are better alone."

So each one, with a heart full of pity for the

man sunk in a stupor from grief and shame, went back, to whisper over the disgrace that had fallen on the Morestoun's life in the seclusion of their bedrooms.

The servants slowly withdrew, and all that remained in the huge hall, dimly lighted by the rays of the moon, were Sir Keith and his sister, and the tall figure of the Prince de Boules.

Madge knelt down again by the chair, and put her arms round that curiously silent figure, but Sir Keith made no response to her tender caress; he sat on in the same dull, almost sullen fashion.

The Prince had sufficient delicacy to keep his lips sealed, though the love he had always felt for Madge struggled hard within him to tell her how great had been his disgust at the work set to his hand. Yet he knew that his conduct could be cleansed by no excuse, and that to her he must ever appear the most contemptible and odious of men.

Lord Dunmoor came back in a few moments.

"I have carried Anice to her room," he said curtly, and even in the moonlight Madge saw the haggard look that had come on his face. "We must get Keith away."

"I cannot move him—he seems turned to stone. Oh, Lord Dunmoor, thank Heaven you are here to-night!"

"I wish I had been dead before this shame came to me," he answered, his voice hoarse with emotion. "My poor mother! And Keith—what has he done that he should have been wronged so terribly!"

"We must get him away from here; I don't like this strange calmness. I fear for his brain."

Even as Madge whispered this Sir Keith slowly lifted his ashen face, and, putting one cold hand on Lord Dunmoor's arm, rose to his feet. As he stood upright his gaze fell upon the tall form of his wife's lover."

"Dunmoor," he said faintly, "tell the Prince de Boules I demand satisfaction without delay."

"When and where you will," replied the Prince, speaking for the first time.

"At seven, in the garden."

"You will remain here till then," added Lord Dunmoor. "The choice of weapons is with you."

"Pistols. If you have none I can supply the want. I never travel without them."

The Prince's tone was calmness itself.

Madge shuddered.

As the two men moved away she followed, tears rolling down her cheeks, and when Sir Keith was in his study she put her arms round him tenderly once again, and buried her face on his breast.

"Keith, my brother!" was all she said, but it went to his heart, pierced through the agony of shame and pain he was enduring.

"Dunmoor," he said, gently. "I leave Madge to your care—she—and—and—your sister. I need add nothing more. Go now, my darling—my brave, sweet, pure sister; you are worn out. This terrible night has almost aged you. Dunmoor, take her away."

"Let me stay with you, Keith. Oh, let me stay!" pleaded Madge, brokenly.

Sir Keith bent forward and kissed her brow.

"May Heaven bless and keep you always, Madge," he prayed, softly. Then, as he released her hand, he said quietly, "Go now, dear; I must be alone."

Madge turned away, tears raining from her eyes. She would have faltered and stumbled but for Lord Dunmoor's firm hold.

"Oh, Heaven spare him!" was the cry in her heart. "He is so young to die."

Lord Dunmoor almost carried her upstairs, and as he reached her door he said, gently,—

"Promise me you will rest? I will do everything that is necessary, believe me."

"I cannot rest. I can do nothing but think that in a few short hours Keith may be dead. Oh, Lord Dunmoor, must this duel be? Is there no escape?"

"None," he answered, grimly. "It is the only way to avenge dishonour."

With that he left her.

Madge sank on to a chair. She heard the footsteps of the servants carrying down the trunks of the Countess and her daughter. She heard the low, sneering laugh of the woman who had twice darkened her brother's life.

She seemed to see at this moment the cruel plot that had been made on Keith's happiness and honour, and realised how success had been brought about through Anice's vanity and heartlessness.

She forgot her own sorrow in this terrible one that had fallen on her brother; yet Rex Darnley's image would come, and a sigh rose easily as she pictured his future life, mixed with such revolting, fiendish cruelty as combined in the person of the Comtesse de Ganyani.

The night wore on. To Madge it seemed as if a century of years stretched between the evening and now. The clock on her mantel-shelf chimed each hour, and the summer dawn crept slowly over the face of night—still she never moved.

Scene by scene of the suffering and pain she had endured in her young life came to her in this terrible vigil.

"It is hard to say," she mused—"hard to say that all is for the best. Am I never—never to taste real happiness? Keith has just been given to me, and before many hours are passed he may be snatched away. If he is spared what will be his life? His heart is broken now. Ah! try as I may fate is against me—I am a blossom of that sorrowful plant!"

At six o'clock a slight tap came to the door. She rose with a shudder. Was it the knell already of her brother's death?

As she turned the handle a figure crept in, a frail form with ashen face, white lips, and eyes so strange and full of fear that for a moment all likeness seemed vanished.

"Anice!" murmured Madge.

"Let me come to you. I cannot stay alone."

Lady Anice's voice was thick and husky, her small hands locked tremblingly together. "I shall go mad if I stay in that room an instant longer."

Madge felt a wave of pity pass through her. This was not the flaunting, heartless, sneering coquette she had known so well; it was a woman, full of mental suffering, a woman whom sorrow had never visited before.

"Come in," she said, gently; "rest there."

She pushed forward an easy chair, but Lady Anice shook her head. She went feebly across to the window, and stood with the sweet, fresh morning air blowing in on her fevered brow. Madge's pity grew greater each moment, though the memory of her brother's shame and agony fought hard against it.

After a moment Anice turned.

"Tell me," she said, feverishly, "what has happened. I must know."

There was almost a return of the old masterful spirit in the last words.

Madge leaned against the wainscot; she was stiff with sitting, and felt suddenly languid and weak.

"In one hour Keith will fight the Prince de Boules."

Lady Anice gave a cry of anguish.

"Fight—oh!—no! no! no! Madge, they must not. I am not worth it. Oh! if I could undo all my foolishness. I see how wicked I have been. Madge, dear—dear Madge!" she moved across and flung herself on her knees before Madge, "do not let them fight—he may be killed."

"He—who? Your lover?"

Against herself Madge's voice was cold as ice.

"No, Keith. Oh! Madge, I have been so wrong—so wicked. I never loved him, but he has been so good to me. Let me tell you all now. Give me your hand. I thought I loved the Prince; yes, I was even jealous of you, but I see now it was not love; it was vanity, idleness, wickedness. Do not judge me too hardly."

"How am I to judge you, Anice?" asked Madge, in tones of agitation; "have you not brought shame—dishonour, on my brother's life?"

Lady Anice shivered.

"No," she murmured, "I have been weak, vain, foolish! oh! most foolish; but I have not dishonoured my own name or my husband's. It is true—I swear it. Will you believe me?"

Madge bent and gazed into the eyes uplifted to her steadily for an instant, then she said,—

"Yes, Anice, I will believe you."

The girl crouched at her feet burst into a flood of tears, and Madge gently soothed her with loving words; when the paroxysm had passed she almost lifted Anice from the ground, led her to the bed, and made her rest there.

There was silence between them for a time, and the minutes slowly ticked by, then Anice put out her hand.

"Madge, go to Keith, entreat him not to fight. I dare not go—I dare not."

Madge took the hot hand in hers and smoothed back the golden curls from the aching brow.

"First tell me what brought you wandering about the house to-night? I must have the truth, Anice."

There was sternness in Madge's voice.

Anice shuddered.

"I will tell you the truth. You know, or perhaps you have not known, that I have—have flirted much lately with the Prince de Boules. He has aggravated me and tormented me by his coolness and his evident love and admiration of you. The Countess saw this, and used to whisper of his passion for you, and how that made him almost cold towards me. To-night she asked me as usual to her room for a chat. You know I gave orders she was to have the red suite of rooms, and her boudoir windows open into the garden. To my surprise and pleasure—yes, I own it, it was pleasure then—the Prince was there, and after awhile the Countess suggested we should go out for a stroll. Mad as I was I eagerly seconded this, and the Prince and I went through the window into the grounds. We had not gone far before he broke out into a declaration of love for myself—no, for you! He seemed carried away, and, seizing my hand, told me of the Countess's hatred towards us all, how that he was in her power, and that she had made him promise he would wreck Keith's happiness, but that for your sake he would break his promises, and so on. I got very angry, my pride seemed to choke me, and I suddenly turned to come in, any particle of love I had felt for this man dying as quickly as it had been born; and then, Madge, when we reached the window, it was locked and the shutters barred. I heard that woman laughing to herself within, and was nearly frantic, when by a mere chance we discovered one of the windows of the drawing-room still open, and regained the house that way. The rest you know."

Madge had listened quietly; she recognised the full folly of this girl, but something told her that Anice's tale was true, and that folly, not shame, was the worst; nevertheless, she knew to what an extent that folly had been carried, and that to Keith it must even seem like dishonour.

"Now you know all. Oh! go to Keith, go to Dunmoor, and stop this duel. Think, I shall be a murderess if they are killed. Oh! go, Madge, do go!"

Anice rose on her pillows and grasped Madge's hand.

"Promise me to remain here and rest. I will see what I can do."

Madge gently pushed her sister-in-law back on the pillows and went away.

Outside the door she put her hands to her aching brow for an instant, and then went slowly downstairs.

In the hall Lord Dunmoor was pacing to and fro.

"I am come from Anice," said Madge, faintly; and then she told the whole story, resting against the balustrade for support.

Lord Dunmoor's face was haggard and worn.

"Is this true?" he asked, gloomily.

"Yes; I believe it, every word."

A light flashed across his face, but then his face darkened.

"She has sinned almost as much, for the world will deem her dishonoured, point the finger of scorn at her."

"Not so; we must let the truth go out to the world for her sake and for Keith's."

A servant approached them at this moment.

"This note was left for you, my lord," he said, "by the Countess when she drove away."

Lord Dunmoor tore it open, and his brow contracted.

"There will be no duel," he said, as soon as they were alone. "Read."

Madge took the paper.

"I do not intend Paul, my future husband, to take part in any tomfoolery to vindicate Keith Moretoun's honour; therefore he leaves this house with me.—HÉLÈNE DE GANYANI."

She was silent for an instant.

"I am glad," she said, after a pause, "for Keith's life is precious to us. Pray Heaven this may be a lasting lesson to Anice, and that in the future happiness will come to them both."

Lord Dunmoor tore the letter to shreds.

"I must go and speak with Keith. I shall tell him all, and see what conclusion he will arrive at. Anice must not expect the tender love she has had so long and thrown away so wilfully to be continued."

"I will come with you."

And Madge went slowly through the hall to the study.

At the door she stopped.

"Let me go first," she whispered.

Lord Dunmoor nodded. As she turned the handle, the brilliant early sunshine flooded the room; it fell in glorious golden patches across the carpet, and rested gently on a man's head bent on folded arms on the table.

"He is asleep, poor fellow!" muttered Lord Dunmoor to himself.

Madge stole to her brother's side.

There was a sheet of writing-paper in front of him, and a pen still within his fingers. A sentence was half begun on the paper, and then came a stroke as if caused by a sudden jerk or start.

The girl stood riveted by the chair for one instant. There was an indefinable sense of awfulness and fear upon her.

"Keith!" she said, laying her head on his shoulder, "dear Keith, it is I, Madge."

There was no reply.

She looked back suddenly at Lord Dunmoor; her pallid lips refused to open.

The man, urged by that mute look, strode forward.

"Come, Keith, old man, wake up," he said, heartily; "all is not so bad. We have a long story to tell you, Keith."

He raised the bent figure slowly in his arms, then gasped rather than spoke,—

"Good Heaven!"

"What is it? Is he ill? Oh, Lord Dunmoor! tell me what is the matter!" cried Madge, wildly, as she saw the cold, set, white face, and watched the hands drop nerveless to the side.

"This is no place for you. Go; send help to me."

Lord Dunmoor's voice was harsh and strained.

"My place is here," returned the girl. "What do you fear? He has fainted; see, his lips move."

Lord Dunmoor shook his head.

"This night has killed him. He is dead!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SUMMER was merged in autumn, and still society gossiped of the strange things that had happened to the Comtesse de Ganyani and that fascinating man, the Prince de Boulet.

"Just fancy! He was a Nihilist or a dynamitard, or something horrible," shuddered the dainty ladies who had thought him the most delightful picturesque man of his day. "And now he is dead, blown to death by his own gunpowder or something. Ugh! Well, I never really liked him, and she was terrible!"

"She had one murder on her soul," a lady said, at one of these confidential chats; "for she killed Keith Moretoun as surely as though she had plunged a knife into him. I shall never forget that night in all my life!"

"Ah, yes! tell us the story again," was the general cry.

And so the tongue of gossip wagged on—the tale of a woman's folly and a man's broken heart—till some other subject cropped up and it was banished.

Three days after that summer morning, when Madge had gazed on her brother's face set in death, the solution of that sudden death had come.

A quiet, grave man arrived at the hall and asked for Lord Dunmoor.

"I am Dr. Hewitt," he said, giving a world famous name; "and I am come to tell you all I can about Sir Keith."

"You knew him then!" Lord Dunmoor said, in surprise.

"Five days ago I was called to Lowtoun," Dr. Hewitt returned; "and when there Sir Keith wrote to me fixing an appointment. He told me he feared there was something wrong with him; indeed, there was much that was wrong. His heart was largely affected, and any great emotion or shock might have proved fatal."

"Tell this to no one but me!" exclaimed Lord Dunmoor, in agitation.

The physician agreed, though a little surprised.

"I will be silent unless I am called upon to declare the truth publicly, then I dare not be silent."

Lord Dunmoor was thinking of his sister lying in a stupor, from which no word could waken her. Was not her remorse and sorrow great enough? was his tender thought. He must spare her this if he could.

For a weary month Madge, forgetful of self, sat beside Lady Anice's sick-bed. She was worn to a faint, frail likeness of the lovely Vera Lorraine who had caused such a furore that night at the Lyric. Her heart was heavy with grief and sick with pain.

A short, curt note had come from Rex, but not to her.

He was in England again; sorrow had come upon her, and yet he never wrote.

"Ah, me!" she often thought, as she sat wearily fanning Anice's fevered brow; "how I was deceived in him! I thought he loved poor Keith, too; yet he seems to have forgotten even his memory."

And weighed down with the bitterness of grief, despite her unselfish courage, Madge drooped and pined till at the end of the month alluded to, Lord Dunmoor said to her one day, abruptly,—

"You must leave this sick-room. Anice is now on the mend; my mother will be here directly, and will nurse you both."

He gazed at the fair, thin face as he spoke, with a heart that throbbed with a deep, true love for this brave, spirited girl who had risen so nobly in the trial that had fallen upon them. But he kept his secret buried.

"It is not for me; it is Rex she loves. Why does he not come? It is breaking her heart."

Madge sighed as he spoke.

"I can do no more," she said, trying to smile. "I think I will go away; my mother-in-law will be delighted to see me. Anice is better. I will go to Bentley."

And so, worn out, and weary almost of living, Madge went back to the village that was the birth-place of her brief, sweet love-dream.

She had insisted, and Sir Keith too, on giving Mrs. Watson and Amy a small, though luxurious, home, and it was genuine pleasure, yet with tears of pity in their eyes, that the two women welcomed her to it.

Amy was shocked beyond measure at the girl's altered appearance.

"We must feed you up on country milk and eggs, Madge, darling!" she said.

"Call me, Vera," was the answer given suddenly; "I like to hear you say it."

She would not own even to herself that she liked it because Rex had spoken it.

"Vera," she said to herself; "true, that is what I shall always be, Rex, to you, and to my love."

She lived a quiet, monotonous existence in Bentley. It was a painful pleasure to tread the old narrow streets and see the Town Hall, where her triumph had been so great.

Maggie and her husband came down while she was here, and the tender-hearted Mrs. Motte burst into tears when she saw her former friend.

"Oh, Vera, darling, how you have suffered! Do come away with us. Wenty and I will take care of you, dear. Do come, do!"

But Vera shook her head.

"I have not endured half what mother did," she said, smiling faintly.

She spoke of her adopted mother, Emilie De Mortimer, whose memory was so dear to her.

"I suppose you heard of Nathaniel's death!" Maggie said, after a pause. "Drink killed him at last. Well, I can't say I am sorry; he was a brute to you."

The Mottes stayed a week, and Vera was glad to be with her staunch, true, loving friend.

"Thank Heaven! you are happy, Maggie," she said, as they parted, "for you deserve it every bit, dear."

"Ah! you will be happy some day," Maggie replied; "won't she, Wenty!"

"Yes, by Jove! she will; she shall," was Mr. Motte's emphatic conclusion, and then they glided away out of the tiny station back to London.

Amy was sorry that Maggie had to go, for Vera seemed even more depressed and ill after that visit than before.

She preferred to sit and walk alone, and all at once the natural sweetness and courage of her nature seemed gone.

"I am weary," she said to herself, "so weary! When will the end come!"

The end was nearer than she thought.

One afternoon as she put on her cloak and hat Amy said to her, lightly,—

"Vera, they say in the village that Lord Vivian has come to Beaconswold for a few days."

"Has he!" Vera answered, the colour fleeting into her face for an instant.

"He may call here. If you are out, have you any message!"

"No, none."

And Vera went rapidly from the house.

"I could not meet him, hear from his lips the truth of Rex's falseness. Are they married yet, I wonder! Heaven knows I wish them all happiness!"

She chose by accident the path across the rough moor that she had taken the day Tom Watson had knelt at her feet to thank her, and Lady Anice had sneered at her so rudely. She went on till she reached the same hollow and the very same spot on which she had rested that day.

It was just growing to a year since that time.

"A year! Will all years be as long, as horrible!" she wondered, vaguely.

Tired with her walk she sank on to the ground and rested back, and gradually the fatigue grew upon her till, soothed by the warm autumn breeze, her eyes closed, and she sank into a soft, gentle sleep.

The minutes passed. Vera was unconscious of aught but her dreams, unconscious that a man was striding across the moor, having descried her figure in the distance, and was now standing gazing down upon her in a state of remorse, anxiety, and passionate love.

"My own sweet darling!" said Rex to himself, as he took his fill of the frail, lovely face, "how you have suffered, and I have not been near! Ah! fate has, indeed, been cruel to us, my Vera!"

He bent over her gently, and whispered her name.

She raised her eyes, and moved into a sitting position. A look of vague alarm came first; then a sudden gleam of joy in her star-like eyes; then her head, with its red-gold glory of short curls, drooped.

"You!" was all she said.

"Yes, Vera; Rex, your own true, devoted Rex. Ah! look up, my darling! Don't turn from me. I know what your gentle heart has suffered, what you have endured from what looked like my cruelty. Vera, give me your hand. Ah! that is well. You trust me! Come to my heart,

MADGE LOOKED BACK SUDDENLY AT LORD DUNMOOR; HER PALLID LIPS REFUSED TO OPEN.

dearest, while I tell you the tale of treachery that has nearly broken both our hearts."

"Treachery," murmured Vera.

Unconsciously she yielded to the joy of his presence, his arm stole round her, and she was once more resting against his breast.

Rex pressed his lips to her brow.

"Months ago, my own, when I was away, thinking of you every hour of the day, I got this letter; mark it well."

Vera gazed at it.

"I never wrote you a letter," she said, involuntarily, as her eyes rested on the writing.

"I know that now, but then—Heaven forgive me for doubting you, my darling—I thought it came from you. In it you told me curtly that you no longer loved me, that you loved Dunmoor instead, and were to be his wife before the year was out."

"Who could have done this!" cried Vera.

Quivering with emotion she would have moved from his arms, but he drew her closer still.

"No, no, don't move till I have told you all. Ah! Vera, what do I not deserve for doubting your faith and loyalty even for an instant!"

Words of self-reproach were trembling on her lips, too, but he went on quietly,—

"Yesterday I came down here with Eric. I knew you were here, and though I deemed you lost to me for ever I was not strong enough to resist the temptation of seeing you once again. My courage was not tried so terribly; for this morning, Vera, another letter came to me forwarded from London."

"Yes," she breathed rather than spoke.

"It was signed Blanche Ganyani, and was a full confession. The letter I received was a forgery—the story of my gift to her and the insinuations that we were betrothed a plot of her mother's to give you pain."

"She succeeded, indeed, only too well," Vera said, with a shiver of recollection. "But oh! Rex, I was wrong; I should have known you better."

He bent his head and kissed her lips silently, and they stood lost in the joy of that moment till Vera, fatigued by the sudden reaction, released herself from his hold and sank with a sigh on to the mound again.

"I feel sorry for that girl with such a mother, Rex," she said, after she had read Blanche's letter through.

"Yes." Rex put his foot on the mound and leaned forward on his elbow, gazing tenderly at his fair love. "Fortunately, she is freed from that wretch. You have heard of De Boules' death. It seems that this woman had always some hold over him, and was the immediate cause of his death. Through jealousy she gave secret information to a Nihilistic society who regarded him as a traitor. Then when she found the man she loved—if love were a thing capable to her—destroyed, she went nearly mad, and eventually put an end to her life—and what a life!"

"And Blanche—what of her?"

"She has been adopted by a clergyman's widow, and will be happy, I hope. She has good points, and was her mother's tool."

"We must be kind to her, Rex," whispered Vera.

He was silent.

"Yes, I know she caused our misery, but that is gone now, and we can afford to be generous;" then, with a sudden, passionate burst Vera said, "Oh! thank Heaven you have come back to me, Rex; it was a weary, weary time."

And his answer was a tender smile and kiss.

* * * * *

Moretoun Hall is once more untenanted. Lady Anice has gone back to her father's house, changed by sudden calamity and sorrow from a vain, frivolous butterfly to a woman with a woman's heart. Her remorse lives with her as keenly as ever, and though as time wears on suitors kneel at her feet she refuses one and all.

"I broke Keith's heart," she says, when she and Madge meet. "I could never forget his memory and my wrong."

And Madge Darnley's reply is to bend forward and kiss the fair, pretty face.

"Your wrong has been forgiven, Anice," she always whispers.

The two women are close friends. That night of horror was the first link in the chain that held them together.

"Poor Anice! I am sorry for her," Madge says sometimes to her husband.

"Yes, she is altered, indeed. I little thought there was so much good in her. It was you, my darling, who brought it out."

"Rex, you really think too highly of me," whispers the lovely young wife.

"Do I!" he answers, as he gazes into her face. "No, no, my Vera, that is impossible for you are not a woman, but an angel from Heaven, my darling!"

[THE END.]

At Coventry it used to be the custom to eat what were called God's cakes on New Year's Day. They were of triangular shape, about half an inch thick, and filled with a kind of mincemeat.

It is well known that the Prince of Wales is an exceedingly liberal man whenever Royal charity is concerned. But probably the smallest donation that the Prince of Wales ever gave to a movement which had his direct patronage and approval was the modest half-crown with which he headed the subscription list in connection with the fund for defraying the cost of a bust of Lord Suffield, Provincial Grand Master of the Norfolk Freemasons. The object of His Royal Highness in limiting his donation to the sum named was in order that all the brethren in the province might subscribe, for of course it would, under the circumstances, not have been proper for any of the brethren to have exceeded this amount.

"HALLO! WHO'S UP THERE!" CRIED THE RECTOR'S VOICE FROM BELOW.

TWICE CHOSEN.

—:o:—

CHAPTER I.

"SCAMP."

"SCAMP! Scamp! where are you!" cried a pleasant, manly voice; but there was not the faintest response, for "Scamp," otherwise Adela Thorndyke, was deep in a sensational novel, and had no mind to be disturbed, even by her father.

"Thomas, what has become of Miss Adela?" he asked of the old gardener, who had lived at the Rectory with him before Adela was born.

A white hand parted the leaves of an ancient walnut tree, and a dainty index finger was shaken at the factotum warningly, even menacingly; but the Rector of Winsthorpe was not a man to be trifled with, except by one person, his daughter Scamp, his one and only, and it must be added, spoilt child; and although Thomas saw the warning hand he dared not say he did not know where the young lady was.

He pushed back his hat, and screwed up his mouth gravely, and raised his honest eyes to his master's face.

"Miss Ad'la's somewheres about, sir," he said. "Maybe she won't be long."

"Come, no prevarication, Thomas; you know where she is!" and the keen grey orbs of the clergyman, who had once been an officer, fixed upon him relentlessly.

"Maybe, sir," he returned, reluctantly; "but, you see, Miss Ad'la has ears, and if she wanted to come——"

"I believe you have let her go up that tree again," said the Rector, hotly.

"Me let her!" answered the old man, in helpless bewilderment. "Lor, sir, how could I ever stop Miss Ad'la?" and he laughed an amused chuckle.

A middle-aged lady here joined the Rector, walking by the side of a tall, aristocratic-looking man of some five and-thirty years of age, whose hair was dark and close-cropped, his features fine and well chiselled, while his soft brown moustache could not hide the sweet grave mouth; his eyes were large and hazel in hue, black-lashed, and earnest in expression.

"My dear," said the Rector, irritably, "I believe Adela to be up in that tree, and I have said I won't have it, over and over again. One of these days she'll break her neck, and who would have thought it? It was easier to keep a whole regiment in order than that slip of a girl. Thomas, is Miss Adela up there or no?"

The hand became doubly animated among the green leaves, and a pair of hazel eyes were fixed upon it, while a smile parted the grave lips.

"Well, she be," replied the old man, regretfully. "I can't tell you an untruth, master."

"Oh, you sneak!" cried a bright, mellow, girlish voice, and the yellow paper-covered novel came whirling at the old man's head.

The gardener ducked, and the book hit Mr. Thorndyke upon the shoulder.

"A novel, too, I vow!" he exclaimed, angrily. "I will not allow Adela to read novels; she is too young to have her head filled with rubbish. Mamma, it is for you to see that such books do not get in her way," and he handed it to his wife.

"But really, Edward, I know nothing about it. This volume is not ours!" said Mrs. Thorndyke, somewhat helplessly, looking at it the while.

"Well, give it to me, then, and I'll find out to whom it does belong, and they shall have a spice of my mind upon the subject," and he began to turn the leaves over with a quick hand.

A sudden commotion was heard in the tree, and the leaves commenced to quiver, the boughs to shake, and a bright *espiègle* face peeped out from the branches.

"Let me have it back, dad!" said Adela, coaxingly. "I know you will, for you are such a dear old pet, and never refuse me anything."

"Nothing that is for your good, Scamp," he replied, the clouds passing from his brow, and then he turned, with a smile, to his friend.

"Did you ever know such a little witch!" he laughed. "Ah! Egerton, you're lucky not to have a daughter like Scamp to worry you."

"If that is Scamp, I don't think I should object," said Captain Egerton, his eyes fixed on the beautiful, animated face, framed in the tender green of the walnut leaves.

A golden-brown, curly head which the sun had caught and turned to burnished gold, a pair of laughing blue eyes, set in dark curved lashes, with a look of defiance in them. Two coral-red cupidon lips, and a row of pearl-like teeth—a fair, white skin, flecked with a golden freckle, and cheeks which glowed with health and strength.

"Did you ever see such a witch?" repeated her father, looking at her with loving pride. "Adela, whose book is this? I mean to know!"

When Mr. Thorndyke called her Adela, she knew he meant to try and be firm with her, and that there would be the semblance of a battle between them, and she made a mutinous *moue*.

Then the remembrance came to her that there was a name on one of the first pages of the book, and she determined that her father should not see it.

The lovely vision vanished, and a violent scrambling took place among the verdant leaves, and in a few moments the girl swung herself down with a graceful movement and marvellous agility, and descended upon the Rector with outstretched arms, which she threw around his neck, and kissed him on cheeks and brow; then, as if purely by accident, she took the book from his hand, and he never saw that he was vanquished.

Mrs. Thorndyke recognised the fact, and smiled, for thus the battle generally ended between her husband and daughter.

"Egerton," he said, "let me introduce you to

my girl," and turning to her, he added, "you have often heard me speak of Captain Egerton, Scamp, have you not?"

"Often," she answered; "but I expected to see an old fellow like——," and she hesitated and blushed.

"Like me, eh!" laughed Mr. Thorndyke. "You see she is truthful, if not polite, Egerton!"

"I would rather see it so than the other way. And so, Miss Scamp, you have heard of me? and I have very, very often heard of you; so we must be friends."

"Must we?" she asked, studying his face. "I shall like that."

"Forward young puss!" said her father, pulling her hair.

"Not forward, Thorndyke, honest; and now, young lady," he added, "are you not going to shake hands?"

"No, I wasn't, because mine are all dirty from climbing the tree," she laughed.

"I rather like clean dirt," he said, joining in her merriment.

"Now, look here, Adela," began her father, sternly, "you are too old for tree-climbing, and I won't have it!"

"Too old to climb trees, and too young to read books!" she exclaimed, piteously. "Why, dad, where is my fun to come in?"

"Bless me, child, are there not plenty of other things to do?"

"Nothing but riding Peggy barebacked, and you say I am too old for that; in fact, I am either too young or too old for everything I care to do!"

"Why, Dela, there's tennis, and badminton, and bowls, and you may ride on Peggy as often as you like with a saddle, and read the books your father chooses for you, and sit in the tent, or under the verandah. There are plenty of things to amuse you, dear child!" said Mrs. Thorndyke.

"Tennis is too tiring, unless you have someone to pick up the balls," she returned, shaking her bright head. "There's always too much wind for badminton—the shuttlecocks worry you to death. I don't care for bowls; it makes your back ache. I hate riding with a saddle, it's too tame; you might as well sit in an armchair at home. As for books of dad's choosing,"—she shrugged her well-shaped shoulders with an expressive gesture—"the less we say about them the better. As for the tent, it's stifling; and the verandah is so draughty it gives you a stiff neck for a month. Not one of those things will amuse me one little bit, mother mine; but I do love a nice book in my snug corner in the dear old tree," she added with a smile.

"Simply because you are told not to do it," said her father, warmly. "Well, I hope you will outgrow your perversity, Adela; it is the fault you should conquer. For the rest, I have no complaint against you. You are a dear, good girl. Why, where is that book?"

But Adela Thorndyke was out of earshot, or pretended to be, and was running with fleet steps across the lawn.

It is to screen someone else, not herself, she has carried off that volume. I have said I will not have books lent her until I have seen them; but she gets them, nevertheless, somehow—wheedles them out of someone, I suppose."

"I am certain she would out of me," laughed the Captain, "regardless of what you might say to me on the subject. If I am to stay here, Thorndyke, I warn you that your Scamp will be able to lead me away. I shall find myself sitting up in that tree with her before a week is out."

They all laughed at the idea; but it soon came about, for all that.

CHAPTER II.

"FRIENDS."

Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke had gone out to pay a round of visits, and the Captain and Adela had watched them drive off in the village cart with Peggy till they were out of sight.

Then the girl turned suddenly, and looked at her companion.

"What shall we do?" she asked.

"Anything you like," he responded. "I'm at your service."

"Really? Or is that politeness?"

"Really! I'll do whatever you ask me—if it be to turn Catherine wheels like the street arabs for your amusement. I learnt the accomplishment when I was a boy."

She clapped her hands.

"I should like to see you—but I won't ask that, for you were wounded in the head, were you not? and it might make you ill."

"It's more than likely," he laughed. "I forget I am cracked china sometimes."

"And, besides, you are too tall and dignified for that sort of thing. I shouldn't like you if you looked ridiculous."

"Then you do like me, Adela?" he said, eagerly.

"Of course I do; you're a dear, and awfully nice."

They were walking round the garden now, and she stopped before a rose tree and plucked him a lovely bud, and placed it in his button-hole, with the innocent freedom of a child.

"There! now it is your turn to give me one, Captain," she said merrily.

He turned to a syringa bush laden with white flowers, filling the air with its sweetness, and picked a spray.

"Here are orange blossoms for you, Scamp," he said softly.

"Papa would call that talking nonsense," she replied, shaking her sunny head, "because they are not, and you know it, Captain Egerton."

Then they came to the old walnut tree, and stood beneath it.

"Don't you want to smoke?" she asked. "I like the smell of tobacco out-of doors."

"I shouldn't mind a weed at all," he admitted.

"Go up to my parlour," she suggested; "it's quite a little room—place one foot there, and another there, catch hold of that bough, and you will find it quite easy."

He caught her young enthusiasm, and obeyed her to the letter, and was soon looking down.

"What a delightful place!" he said. "Are you not coming up, Scamp?"

She ascended with far greater ease than he had done, with cat-like grace; and in a few moments they were seated side by side upon the leafy throne which the girl so loved—he contentedly enjoying a cigar, while she sat by, watching the white smoke curl up through the branches.

He caught sight of the book which had been the subject of dispute between her and her father, stuck in a crevice in the tree, and took it up; and as he did so, the leaves opened, and he read upon the first page the name of Horace Lake, and his eyes rested upon the words.

"Who is Horace Lake, Adela?" he asked, a strange shade of disappointment crossing his brow, and an equally strange pain contracting his heart.

"He's an awfully jolly fellow!" she returned with animation. "And he does no end of things for me. I cannot think what I should do without him."

"Oh, indeed! An how old is this paragon?"

"He is about twenty."

"And you?"

"I'm fifteen. But I thought it wasn't polite to ask ladies their ages!"

"Do you wish me to be polite, Adela?"

She sat still a moment thinking. Her large eyes looking into vacancy—self-absorbed. He laid his hand upon her arm, and she looked up at him.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

"I want you to be always just what you are," she answered, with a smile.

"A pretty compliment, Scamp," he said, with a brightened look. "Never, never more nor less to you than I am now? Is that your wish?"

"Certainly never less!" And then she hesitated, but turned her bright eyes to his frankly.

"I want you to promise that we shall always be friends!" she went on eagerly. "I know you're a great deal older, and all that, but I like you, and I don't care for many people!"

"Of course, we will be friends, Scamp. We are friends, my child, and will remain so, so long as you will let the compact last." And he took her hand and held it in a firm clasp.

Suddenly she broke out into a merry laugh. "Do you know you are encouraging me in disobedience!" she asked.

"I knew I should if ever I were put to the test!" he said, laughing too. "I told Thorndyke so!"

"Told father! And what did he say?"

"He didn't say much. He thought it was fun, but I knew it was earnest."

Again she relapsed into the transcendental mood, and as quietly broke it with the bright upturned glance.

"You won't split upon Horace, will you? You shouldn't have seen the book if I had not thought I could trust you!"

"You can trust me. The name of Horace shall not pass my lips!"

"You are a brick! I felt sure of it, or I shouldn't have asked you to be chums," she replied with animation.

"Brick! chums! The terms would have sounded fast and slangy from less beautiful lips than Adela Thorndyke's, and have disgusted the sensitive ears of Cecil Egerton, but she spoke them with such childlike grace and ease, looking so bright and happy the while, that he could not quarrel with them in her.

"Who taught you slang, young lady?" he inquired, playfully.

"Not papa, you may bet!" she laughed. "He's real riled when he hears me."

"Nor mamma!" suggested Cecil.

"Not exactly; mother is very patient—but slang does nearly give her a fit."

"Then why do you use it, little woman? It cannot add to your happiness, and from your account it diminishes that of your parents!"

"Not a bit of it. I torment them, and they enjoy it; it is like being tickled with a feather—some people delight in it. Dad and mam do in my naughtiness; they would be quite lost without it. As to slang, I simply love it; if we are to be friends you must not expect me to be sedate, and sit on my hind legs all day. I couldn't do it for anyone, not even for you!"

"Not for Horace!" he asked.

"Horace!" and she broke out into merriment. "Why, he likes it; he has taught me all the mischief I know!"

"Oh! has he? You seem an apt pupil!" retorted Captain Egerton, amusement and annoyance struggling for the mastery in his mind.

"I am," she admitted, "because I enjoy it so much!"

"*Enfant terrible!*" he sighed.

By the bye," said Adela, reflectively, "you have broken your word!"

"I have! How?"

"You said the name of Horace should not pass your lips, and it has!"

"Oh! I didn't mean to you, child!"

"Well, then you're forgiven—but to no one else, mind!"

"And what is this paragon of perfection like?" asked Cecil, somewhat bitterly.

"I never said he was perfection! I said he was awfully jolly, and so he is!"

"Well! what is he like?"

"Like? Not at all like you!"

"That is only telling me what he is not like!"

"Oh! I see, I must mind my P's and Q's with you, Mr. Severity; you're nearly as bad as Mrs. Jackson, who comes here sometimes!"

"And what does Mrs. Jackson do?"

"Do! Why, she's an authoress, and edits me upon every possible occasion. Do you know any authors? Save me from them!"

"Yes, I know a few."

"What do you think of them?"

"I generally find them inclined to be silent and reserved; people are too apt to try and draw them out, and make a show of them, I fancy, and they resent it, and keep their ideas for their books!"

"I wish Mrs. Jackson would!"

Then she began again,—

"Don't they ever try to edit you?"

"No! I suppose they think I am past it!"

"I should be glad if Mrs. Jackson would think that of me," said Adela.

"Naughty Scamp! You should wish to be improved."

"Should I?" she inquired naively. "Well, I don't—I like being naughty best. No one would love me half so well if I were not a Scamp. If I were tractable and obedient everyone would say I was a very good girl, and there the matter would end; there would be no further interest in me, you see; but it's a little excitement for everyone to scold me, and forgive me, and all that, both for them and for me. It must be very oppressive to be a saint!"

"It never struck me in that light before," laughed Cecil; "but now you mention it, there is something in the idea. The wild son is always the mother's favourite, I do believe."

"Of course he is! From the lost sheep in the parable down to me, the naughty one gets all the petting—the bad little animal got carried, and all the rest had to trudge home on foot."

"So I suppose you never mean to try and become a model young woman?"

"Not I. I should bore myself terribly, and how Horace and Lilian would laugh at me!"

"And who is Lilian?"

"Oh! she's a chum of mine, too. Lilian Freemantle her name is, and she's a very pretty girl indeed. It's a pity you can't see her; but she's at school now. She is the daughter of Sir Richard Freemantle of Marsden Hall, and he's an old tartar. He would make a nun of Lilian if he dared, and if it were not for me the poor girl would be crushed; but I am wicked enough for two, and help her when she wants it."

"I hope you don't lead her into mischief, Scamp."

"Of course I do when I can. Sir Richard won't let her see anyone but ourselves, and fondly thinks she cannot take any harm under the Rector's wing, and when he is here I'm as demure as a mouse."

"I didn't know mice were demure."

"Now you're editing! I didn't think you would be so nasty. You're as bad as Mrs. Jackson."

"What, quite?"

"Well, nearly. In fact, I'm not sure you're not worse, because, you know, we're friends."

"And do you think friends ought never to correct each other, little one?"

"Never. They ought to think whatever the other does is right, and accept their acts and sayings without question. That is my idea of friendship," she said, warmly, "and so it is Lilian's too."

"And Horace's?"

"Yes, and Horace's."

"Well, it is not mine, Adela," and he was silent.

The girl sat still, pondering his words, and he gently blew away his cloudlets of white vapour with an unconcerned look.

She hoped he would begin to speak again; but he did not, and she was soon tired of being quiet.

"What is yours?" she inquired at length.

"My what?" he answered, with apparent indifference.

She flushed.

"Oh, if you have so soon forgotten it does not matter!" she said, vexedly.

"And if I have not forgotten!"

"Then you're a horror!" she retorted, springing up, "and I'm off."

He stretched out his hand and stayed her.

"Where are you going, Scamp?"

"Anywhere away from you; I don't care where."

"Then you may as well sit down again."

She hesitated.

She didn't really want to go; she would much prefer to spend the rest of the afternoon by his side, but she was annoyed with him.

"Will you stay if I give you my definition of friendship?" he asked, with a smile, drawing her towards him.

"Yes, if you will do that," and his smile was reflected upon her face.

"Well, sit down, little one, and I'll try; but I'm not good at putting my thoughts upon such subjects into shape."

He took a long pull at his weed, as if to draw inspiration from it, and began,—

"I do not consider a friend shuts his eyes to obvious faults."

"That is telling me what you do not consider friendship, not what you do!" she retorted, severely, repeating his own words.

"Mocking bird!" he laughed, "you've scattered all my ideas, and they were sublime! You'll never now hear the grand image under which I was about to paint my wingless Cupid."

"Oh! a sort of lost chord, eh! Well, if this is the way you keep your promises I won't trust you again," and once more she arose, then as suddenly stopped.

"What do you mean by a wingless Cupid, Captain Egerton?"

"Do you not know the lines,—

'Friendship is love without wings!'

That will do for my definition, Scamp. Love may be blind to faults, friendship is not; Love may make difficulties fly, for friendship they will only walk."

"How do you know? Have you ever been in love?" she asked, turning her great eyes upon him.

"Never! have you?"

"No, but I should like to be; it must be such fun."

"Fun!"

"Awful fun. Do you know I am sure I should torment my lover dreadfully."

"I can quite believe it," he said, breaking out into a hearty laugh. "You're a perfect little Phyllis; your father should have named you so."

"And what did she do? something nice?" she asked archly.

"Naughty, and nice," he returned. "Don't you know the song?"

"No, do you sing it? I have heard papa say you have a beautiful voice."

"That is very kind of him, I'm sure."

"Will you sing me Phyllis?"

"Well, I'm afraid I can't after that."

"Do, please. I want so much to hear the words," and she laid her hand upon his arm in a manner not to be resisted.

He took his cigar from his lips and laid it aside, and turning to her with a smile, sang a snatch of the old ballad,—

"Phyllis is my only joy,
Faithless as the wind or seas,
Sometimes forward, sometimes coy,
Yet she never fails to please."

"It is very pretty," she said, "but Captain Egerton, do you think I am faithless?"

"I hope not, child, but who can tell? Even gold must be tried by fire. Of one thing I am certain, you will be the joy and torment of some poor fellow's life one of these days."

"Would you be sorry for him?"

"I hardly know. If you loved him a little—yes!"

"And if I were very fond of him?"

"You would make him wildly happy, or intensely miserable," he said gravely, even sadly.

"How old are you?" she asked, irrelevantly.

"I am thirty-five. Why?"

"Because you were looking a hundred just now, and as though you had been a judge on the bench all your life."

"Was I of so very severe an aspect?"

"Very. Vinegar crusts were nothing to you!"

"You're a polite young lady."

"Am I? It's to take the edge off the compliment about your voice. Go on with the song, please."

"No, thanks!"

"You're sulky!" she asserted, looking at him thoughtfully. "Well! you are touchy! I often say much worse things than that to Horace, and he doesn't mind a bit!"

"Oh! bother Horace!" he said, irritably.

"Why, certainly!" she replied, like a veritable Yankee, with an exasperating laugh.

"I'm tired of him. Who is the fellow? Does he live here?"

"If you're tired of him why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know, to be sure!"

"Well then, he is the son of Mr. Lake, the solicitor, and he'll be a lawyer himself some day I suppose—although he doesn't want to be!"

"And what does he desire to be?"

"Dear me," your interest is growing in the young man," she remarked, mockingly.

"Not at all; but as you are my friend, and he is yours, I ought to know all about him."

"Ah! that's a sort of logic, isn't it?"

"Don't tease, child; you're too young to know anything about logic."

"No, I'm not; I can prove to you by logic that it's raining now. Horace taught me how to do it!"

"Well?"

"It either rains, or it doesn't rain. It doesn't rain, therefore it rains. Do you see?"

"Not clearly."

"Ah! evidently the rain is a Scotch mist, in this instance!"

"You're a sharp young puss!"

"Have you only just found it out?" she laughed. "Horace says I'm as sharp as a blunt needle!"

"What a clever simile, and so new!" he retorted, mockingly. "Well, and what does this clear-sighted young man aspire to?"

"Well, you see," said Adela, gravely, "I don't quite like to tell you!"

"Why?"

"You might think me rude; Mr. Lake is rather a wag, you see!"

"Do you mean Horace by Mr. Lake?"

"No, his father, who is blessed with three sons, and he has made up his mind what to do with each of them."

"Oh! indeed!"

I heard him tell papa that his three boys were totally different, and that he should place them out in life according to their abilities!"

"Wise man," remarked the Captain.

"'Horace wishes to enter the army,' he said to papa, 'but that will never do, he has too many brains for an officer—he must go into my office. Tom's a rake—he will make a good soldier. Bob's a fool, and he will do for a parson; and Horace is a rogue, he's just fitted for a lawyer."

Captain Egerton broke out into a merry peal of laughter.

"The old fellow is honest, at any rate; and I'm blessed if there is not a certain amount of truth in what he says."

"Papa thinks there's a great deal."

"What, when he's a parson himself?"

"He is one from conviction, not for the sake of a living, as so many are. A young man has an uncle a bishop, and from his cradle it is settled he is to be a clergyman, no matter what his predilections are; and, besides, you're a soldier, and you acknowledge that there is a point in the remark."

"That's true. And so your friend is the rogue of the family? Does your father like him, Adela?"

"Yes, just as Mr. Lake likes me. He thinks him a pickle, but he can't help liking him."

"Shall I see him?"

"See him? no! He's at college."

Captain Egerton breathed more freely.

"He would want you to tell him all about the campaigns you have been through if you and he were to meet. He is always drawing dad out, and sometimes we have such interesting anecdotes, until he finds out the facts, and then he collapses like a telescope."

"That's very natural."

"But why don't soldiers like to talk of what they have gone through?"

"Have you ever heard of braggadocio?"

"Rather!"

"Well, soldiers see such strange sights, and go through such marvellous experiences, that if we were to tell half we have seen we should get the credit of going in for it."

"In other words, it is not churlishness, but modesty?"

"In most men, I think."

"I wish you would go on with that song!" said Adela, suddenly dashing from one subject to another.

"Will you be very nice if I do?"

"Very, very, most particularly nice!"

"How will you do it, Scamp?" he asked, softly.

"Like this," she replied, slipping her hand into his. "Won't that suit?"

"Excellently!" he laughed, as he clasped it in both his own. "But first, child, do you know I am going away to-morrow? Will you be sorry?"

"Must you go?" she asked, her eyes upraised to his.

"Duty calls."

"I wish it didn't."

"Then you like me to be with you?"

"Awfully, and especially up here in my own green den."

"I shall remember this afternoon, Scamp, as long as I live."

"I expect I shall, too."

"You are not sure, then."

"Yes I am," she acknowledged, a dimple deepening in her chin; "only I thought I'd tease you."

"Phyllis again! Child, I wonder how you and I will meet in the future?"

She looked at him in surprise.

"Why, are you not coming back to Winsthorpe, now you have found your way here once?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Ours is the first regiment for foreign service. We may be abroad for years, and by the time I return I shall find you flown from Winsthorpe, perhaps."

"Flown from Winsthorpe?"

"Yes. Married, very likely—tormenting some fool of a parson, or rake of a soldier, or rogue of a lawyer," he said, with the ghost of a smile.

"I don't think I shall be married," she answered, gravely. "I might be engaged."

"Well, well, the one is a prelude to the other, is it not?"

"Not necessarily," she returned. "I doubt if it would ever come to that with me. It would be great fun all the love-making, and that; but when it was all made, wouldn't it be dreadfully tame work? Fancy being expected to do echo to any man's opinions! Why, I should hate him in a week, and make myself disagreeable, and then he would hate me, and that would be the end of the matter."

"Until you found another lover to amuse yourself with, eh?"

"I suppose so," she replied, dubiously.

"What a child you are!" he said, a sudden light breaking out in his face. "Keep so, Scamp,—keep so till I come back. I should like to find you unchanged," he ended, with feeling.

"Should you? I thought you wanted me to be an angel instead of a——"

"Scamp!" he interrupted with a smile. "No, child, an angel would be too fluffy for my taste. Do not change till I come back, and then——"

"Then," she repeated, questioningly.

"How can I tell, child—how can I tell? Scamp, Scamp, will you promise to keep our compact of friendship? Will you never forget me? Child, you have grown strangely dear to me!"

"Never," she answered, a flush rising to her fair young cheek, and an unwonted softness to her eyes. "Cecil, you will always be one apart from the rest of the world to me."

And for the first time Adela Thorndyke peeped through the door of childhood into the golden fields beyond.

A sweet chord was touched in her young heart, and vibrated with tender, scarcely understood happiness.

"Wait, child, wait!" he said earnestly; "wait till I come back."

She no longer questioned what was then to happen—a quivering hope was turning the child into a woman.

"Yes! I will wait," she said, softly.

Then he caught her in his arms, and pressed his lips to her pure white brow.

"My little Phyllis, my little Scamp! will you make me happy or miserable?" he asked.

"Hallo! who's up there?" cried the Rector's voice from below.

For the afternoon had passed, and the long hours had seemed short to the friends in the leafy parlour. The visits were paid, and Mr. Thorndyke and his wife having returned, were puzzled to know what had become of Captain Egerton and Scamp; and so intent were these two upon their conversation that they failed to hear the Rector's footstep as he came down the garden path in search of them.

"Who's up there?" he repeated angrily, as there was no response. "I'll have that tree cut down."

"Don't do that," said Cecil; "it would be a thousand pities—it is simply delightful up here, Thorndyke. Do join us!"

"Join you?" he echoed. "Has Adela dared, after all I said to her?"

"Don't repeat it, dad. I know it so well by heart; but you see I couldn't help it this once, for I was obliged to show my favourite place to Captain Egerton, because you know, after all you said about it, he would have gone away thinking I had done something dreadful if I had not proved to him that it was entirely prejudice on your part, dad."

"Entirely prejudice! Adela, I forbid."

"Yes, entirely prejudice," repeated Cecil, cutting him short. "It is quite a pleasant, natural arbour. Do come up, Rector."

"Well, Egerton, if you're going to encourage Adela in tricks like this it is a good thing you're off to-morrow."

"Ah! perhaps it is; and now I am going to ask a parting favour—will you grant it for old lang syne?"

"For old lang syne I can refuse you nothing, Cecil. I have not forgotten how, when a boy of seventeen, you carried me off the field of battle under the enemy's fire," he said, softening.

"Did he? did he? Oh! I am proud of him!" cried the girl brightly.

"You!" said her father in surprise.

"Well, my request is," said Egerton, "that you will join us here for this once!"

The Rector of Winsthorpe hesitated.

"Oh! do; please do!" cried Scamp. "Place one foot there, and the other there, catch hold of that bough, and I'll give you a hand." And she bent down such a brilliant face. "Do, you dear old dad; it will be such awful fun!"

A spirit of frolic seemed to come over the staid man, and in another moment he was scrambling up the tree in obedience to orders.

"For old lang syne!" he said, as he came panting to the top. "I wouldn't have done it for any other man in the world."

"Edward," said Mrs Thorndyke's quiet voice, "where on earth are you?"

"You may well ask," he replied. "Where, indeed? Scamp has me and Egerton up here as visitors. Perhaps you will join us, my dear? Nothing will surprise me after this."

"Nor me, nor me!" chuckled the old gardener, as he bent over his spade to hide his merriment.

"Oh! Miss Ad'la! She make everyone do as she wants."

Mrs. Thorndyke, declined her husband's friendly invitation!

(To be continued.)

When an Arab widow intends to marry again she visits the grave of her husband the night before the new marriage is to occur. She takes with her a donkey carrying two goatskins of water, which she pours upon the grave, after kneeling and praying that the departed may not be offended.

At Padstow, in Cornwall, it was the custom, so late as 1859, for the rustics to set up a pitcher at a convenient distance on the eve of the Conversion of St. Paul (January 25th) and to throw stones at it. It was called "Paul's Pitcher Day." The pitcher was pelted until it was entirely demolished. Of course, jollification and drinking succeeded the stone-throwing. This custom was in commemoration of the part which St. Paul took in the martyrdom of St. Stephen, and the fact that it was observed on the eve of the festival, and not on the day itself, gives it a special signification.

GIVE HIM BACK TO ME.

—:o:—

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHO IS THE SPY?

Lady Jane Armitage in a beautiful dress of old gold brocké and velvet was standing in a corner of the Countess of Oldthorpe's splendid ball-room with the Hon. Bertie Mayne.

There was no love lost between them, and yet each had tried to be especially agreeable to the other, perhaps because they were so terribly bored in consequence of the absence of someone else.

"The word hatred ought to be expunged from the English language," said Lady Jane, unfurling her feather fan. "We never have the energy to hate—dislike is the utmost we can manage in these days of cold calculation."

"Perhaps a cold hatred is the most deadly of all. The one that calculates and waits—waits on from year to year. You could almost fancy the arm uplifted, and the dagger already in the hand," said Bertie, slowly, a quiet smile about his lips in spite of the gravity of his words.

Lady Jane affected to shiver.

"You put it so graphically, it sounds as if you were drawing on your own experience."

"I am, to a certain extent—my own experience of others. Is there anything deadlier than a woman's feeling for the unfortunate girl who cuts her out?" with a swift glance from under his eyelashes.

A slight shade of colour stole up into Lady Jane's cheeks.

"In penny-dreadfuls the rival, I believe, is generally stabbed or poisoned."

"And in real life the same sort of thing goes on, only without the knife or the strychnine."

"In real life tragedy is the exception."

"Do you really think so?" turning round, the better to watch her face. "Do wives never break their hearts because women will flirt with their husbands?"

"How can I tell?" with a nervous laugh. "I never was a wife, so my heart is not in danger."

"Then, you see, I can generalise without offence," still watching her closely. "The women who belong to the predatory tribes will have something to answer for. If I had my way, the present Calcraft—I forget his name—should try his hand on them."

"Mr. Mayne!" opening her eyes in horror.

"I mean I," an angry light shining in his own. "They are rank cowards—for the wife is so defenceless! If she tries to avenge herself by a little flirtation on her own account there's a 'view halloo' at once, and the pack in full cry after her.

"Then I'm sure some hares like to be hunted," trying to shake off the uncomfortable impression produced by his manner.

But immediately a vision of Violet rose before her, and the reports she had so sedulously fostered.

For the future she felt she would involuntarily think of her rival as a poor helpless hunted hare, on whose trail she had started the eager hounds.

"Oh, yes! and pheasants like to be shot. We shouldn't do it, of course, if they didn't!"

"Now that's absurd! A man's pleasure is to be considered before a bird's."

"Of course; and pleasure rules the world."

"Now, Mr. Mayne, confess—you are straying from your original subject. Are you capable of a fierce hatred yourself!" turning round to meet his glance with a playful smile.

"I am, Lady Jane," was the prompt response. "There is one man living whom I could see hanged, or skinned, or crushed to death, and feel the fate too good for him!"

"You can't mean it!" with a little laugh. "Have I ever seen him? Do I know him!"

"Report says you have seen him rather oftener than his wife."

"Mr. Mayne!" with a gasp, as a flood of crimson poured over her face to the very roots of her hair. "I—I can't conceive whom you mean!"

"No, I suppose not," very quietly; "report generally lies. I knew you would be the last woman on earth to stand between a man and his wife."

"Most certainly. I—I hate that sort of thing."

"You must. You and your brother pull very well together, don't you?"

Instantly she was reminded of Ralph Armitage's absurd infatuation for Violet, and her heart sank within her with an overpowering sense of shame.

Was it true that she and he, true brother and sister, were trying to drag the unfortunate girl down to the lowest depths of woe?

"Pretty well—as well as most. That is to say, he comes to me fast enough if he thinks I can help him," she said, with affected carelessness.

"That is very convenient, for then you can play into each others' hands," with an innocent smile, as if he had no such thing as a dark insinuation in his mind. "But take my advice and don't go too far, Lady Jane. Edged tools are interesting playthings, but the sooner they are dropped the better."

"Certainly; I don't like cutting my fingers. Why should Ralph and I have a liking for edged tools?" her eyes wandering over the brilliantly lighted drawing-room, as if in search of some excuse for an interruption.

She had always had a fancy that Bertie Mayne might be rather nice. He had a higher standard than most young men, and she had a sort of idea that to be approved by him was as good as an order of merit; but now he was talking so oddly that she would be thankful to get rid of him.

"How can I tell?" he said, in answer to her question. "Only I warn you that those who employ edged tools against me or mine," with a significant emphasis to show that he really meant his sister, "will find their own fingers cut before they know it."

"I don't understand why you should warn me!" haughtily, though she understood so well that every word made her feel uncomfortable.

"Of course I used 'you' in the general sense. According to what you told me just now your conscience must be perfectly clear, or I could not have mentioned the subject. I don't often speak of my sister, but I feel impelled to confide in you to-night," with a pleasant smile. "Do you know that I am as sure as possible that some woman has got between her and her husband—not in the vulgar sense," as he saw her brows drawing together. "I believe she has got hold of him somehow, that she acts as a spy on Violet's actions, that she perverts every innocent friendship into something dangerous, that she eggs on another to join in this dirty game; and between them they convince Sartoris that my poor sister, instead of being an angel of the celestial sort, is one of the fallen ones; instead of being the model wife that any man ought to be proud of, is one of the fast fraternity, who find every male amusing except their own husbands!"

She looked up at him, murmuring something confusedly, as she wondered if she must take it to herself, or if she could safely ignore it. A sudden thought struck her in the midst of her confusion; perhaps he might know where Jack Sartoris was, and end this gnawing anxiety.

"If you find out the woman show her no mercy, Mr. Mayne," she said, eagerly; "for I am sure she will deserve none. I only wish that Mr. Sartoris were here, to hear with his own ears, and see with his own eyes. You don't know where he is?"

Bertie Mayne could have laughed aloud at the naïveté of the question, but he remained as grave as a judge, and said quietly: "No I don't. You can't tell me, can you?"

"I? How should I, when even his bankers know nothing?"

"Do you mean to say you were kind enough to ask them? We ought to be grateful for the interest," with a sharp look that belied the simplicity of the question.

"I didn't ask," colouring deeply. "But my brother did, and the answer was that they had seen nothing of Mr. Sartoris since he last went down to Farndon Court."

"He must have drawn a cheque or two. That is the only way I believe they'll ever find out if he is in the land of the living."

"It seems he drew out a considerable sum before he went."

"What a prey for a pickpocket! Shall we take another turn, Lady Jane? You waltz so divinely."

Lady Jane did not dare to offend Bertie Mayne, so she agreed, and soon they were lost in the gyrating crowd. If her feet had been as heavy as her heart, Mr. Mayne would have had some difficulty in dragging her round the room, for he was no Hercules, and he disliked much exertion. He had enjoyed stabbing her quietly behind her moral mask, and he now chose to dance with her, because he was sure that she did not like it.

"Bertie looks as if he were really enjoying himself," Lady Stapleton remarked, with a placid smile; and so he was, but after a fashion peculiar to himself.

He knew that Lady Jane felt as if he had half skinned her, and he thought over the process with a smile of intense satisfaction. She was an admirable partner, and their steps went very well together, but she gave a sigh, as of intense relief, when the final chords of the music came, and he took his arm from round her waist.

"A capital spin!" he said, with an attempt at enthusiasm. "I felt as if we were a pair of twins, long separated, come together at last."

"I didn't," she said, breathing quickly. "I have nothing in common with you, nor you with me. I think it must be time for supper."

"May I have the honour of taking you in?"

"No, thanks. I am pledged to the veriest bore in the whole room. I was wondering where Ralph was."

"I'll go and hunt him up." With a low bow he departed, and Lady Jane breathed a devout "Thank Heaven!" He had stung her conscience, he had wounded her self-respect, he had ruthlessly dragged her back-slidings into the light of day; he had let her see in the plainest way that her hidden treacheries were known, and might any day be exposed before the world. Oh! where could she hide herself when the storm came? She had no husband behind whose strong arm to shelter herself. Her brother, by common report, was no doubt implicated in the same thing, therefore could be no good to her.

Dozens of persons must have seen how his restless eyes were always seeking the door until Lady Stapleton came sailing in with a young girl in her wake, whom she had promised to chaperon, and Bertie Mayne's close-cropped head bringing up the rear. If he had just lost all his relations by one swoop he could not have looked more tragic; and she could have shaken him for being such an idiot as to take the whole roomful into his confidence. His voice had been quite hoarse as he said, with angry eyes fixed on Lady Stapleton's smiling face,—

"May I ask why Mrs. Sartoris hasn't come?"

"My niece is unfortunate enough to have a headache, and begs to be excused."

"She might have said something else," he replied, with a sneer. "Headaches are played out, aren't they?"

"I wish they were. Ah! Lady Oldthorpe, how lovely your rooms look!" and the widow turned her back serenely on Mr. Armitage, whom she was certain by this time that she couldn't endure.

By her advice Violet had accepted the invitation in order to avoid persecution; but she never had the slightest intention of facing another meeting with Ralph Armitage so long as it was possible to avoid it.

"I wish I were dead," said Lady Jane, petulantly. "I don't believe there's anything worth living for," and yet the next moment she was forcing herself to smile as sweetly as she could on a young millionaire with an empty head and a well-stocked purse, whom she was thinking of honouring with her hand—some day, when spinsterhood had become intolerable.

Bertie Mayne started on his search for Ralph Armitage, and found him moodily meditating behind the curtains draping a window. He tapped him on his arm to attract his attention, and laughed at the nervous start he gave.

"You might be a pickpocket and I a policeman," he remarked, with a smile. "Your sister wants you."

"Oh—ah—thanks!"

"By the bye, have you ever heard anything of that fellow St. John?" Bertie asked on the spur of the moment, reminded of Holly Bank by the sight of Armitage's face.

"No, he never was a friend of mine. Why should I?" his face pale as death, his eyes wild and restless.

"Don't know," carelessly, "but if I were a friend of his I'd have the Crannock dragged. I bet you a fiver he's at the bottom of it!"

"Good heavens! Will nothing convince you?" speaking angrily to conceal his agitation. "The porter swore he went up to town."

"I daresay; but just drop me a line if you come across him. I don't know why—but somehow, I take an interest in him. You are not looking well; what's up?"

"Nothing; only bored to death. I think I shall stope," walking towards the drawing-room, and wishing Mr. Bertie Mayne—a good-looking, irreproachable young man, the hope of mothers with marriageable daughters—at the very bottom of a quite inaccessible sea!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STRANGER AT THE INN.

When Ralph Armitage went to bed that night his brain was on fire. It seemed to him, in his wild and reckless passion, that to live any longer without the woman he loved was impossible. He could not exist for another day in this state of uncertainty without doing something towards ending it.

What that "something" was to be he would tell to no one. He would have hidden it even from himself if that were possible, but at least he could conceal it from his sister.

The next morning, having slept scarcely ten minutes, he started out to do a great deal of business. About noon he was to be seen in St. James's-street, chatting pleasantly with anyone who came up for a minute's gossip, and informing everyone he came across that he was running down into the country for a few days' shooting.

"Lucky fellow!" said one, who was hurrying off to the Treasury—one or two hours late as usual. "Not tied to a desk as I am—take it out at Easter, see if I don't!"

"Going to the Forresters, I suppose?" said another, with a twinge of jealousy. "Awful shame to think I'm tied by the leg!"

"What are you thinking of? The Colonel's in town," rejoined Armitage, and then with a nod he walked on, not having mentioned his real destination.

That evening he sent for a cab, put into it a small and rather shabby portmanteau with his own hands, then got in, and was driven to Paddington Station.

"Where to, sir?" asked a porter, already shouldering his portmanteau.

"Bless me, what a fool I am!" he ejaculated, impatiently. "I never meant to come here. I told the fellow to drive to St. Pancras!"

Another cab was called and started eastwards, but before he had gone more than half-a-mile the direction was changed, and Ralph Armitage was finally deposited at Charing Cross.

Very late the next night a fly drew up at the door of the "Lion d'or," Belleville. The inmates had apparently all gone to bed, for in that remote part of Auvergne the hours are primitive, but presently a night-capped head was thrust out of a window, and an animated colloquy ensued.

The result of the colloquy was that the door was soon opened by a figure in a dressing gown, whose oddly-shaped oil-lamp cast a broad ray of light on the traveller's face.

M. Simon saw an English gentleman with dark, piercing eyes and a bushy, brown beard, and as a visitor at that time of year was either a miracle or a godsend, a voluble welcome was

extended to him at once, and he was absorbed into the ray of light, portmanteau and all, in the space of a minute and a half, whilst the driver, anathematising everything but the liberal fare he had just received, turned his tired horses towards the dark and dreary road, feeling as if he were shut out from paradise—for the paradise of the cold and hungry must be any place where there's food and warmth; of the weary, where there's rest; of the lonely, wherever a friend's face smiles a welcome.

"Write your name in our visitors' book, monsieur, please," said the landlady, the next morning, as she deposited a large volume on the table of the little salon. "We have crowds in the summer, for the scenery around is magnificent, as monsieur can see for himself," with a wave of her hand towards the window, from which a splendid chain of snow-capped mountains was visible through a shower of sleet. "But a visitor at this time of year is generally past praying for, and it is a blessing we do not wish to forget."

"You must write it yourself, madame," he said, as he turned the leaves over with a careless hand. "I hurt my fingers last night in the door of the railway carriage, and I couldn't hold a pen."

"Oh, but, monsieur, I will wait; there is no hurry."

"No, I don't know how long I shall stay. Write, and I will spell it to you."

After a few protestations, Madame took up the pen, and wrote after his dictation; and when she had ended with a final flourish, she read out, in her queer French accent,—

JOHN SARTORIS,
of Farndon Court,
Devonshire.

"That will do; now I'll give you another address which you can put in your memorandum-book. I am fond of climbing inaccessible places, and I've often met with serious accidents, so I make it a practice to give the name of a friend or a relative to the people where I am staying, so that they may have some one to appeal to if anything happens to me."

"Oh, but, monsieur, for the love of Heaven, be careful," cried Madame Simon, with uplifted hands, "or I shall not have a moment's rest when you are out of my sight."

"Madame need not afflict herself if I roll from the top of the 'Eagle's Nest' into the valley below. Life isn't such a pleasant business that we need cling on to it with both hands."

"But, monsieur, we must all wait till the good Creator calls us."

"Yes! if we've got anything to live for. Now take up your pen, madame, and write—" slowly spelling the direction, "Lady Stapleton, 50, Brook-street, London, England. That's right," inspecting it. "You write a splendid hand. Is it a mistake, or have you really got some lakes which are worth seeing in the bosom of the mountains?"

"But it's no mistake, monsieur. Only just half a league from the end of the garden you climb Mount Pilate, and find the 'Devil's Saucepan,' which is so deep that no line has ever been found long enough to measure it. The story runs that a witch was drowned there, and when the storm-winds blow you can hear her shrieks; but my husband says it's the echoes in the hollows, but men never will believe anything they ought!"

"Women believe everything," said the Englishman, whom the reader must have already guessed to be Ralph Armitage; "so they make it even between them. You must tell me some of your legends, madame; the more horrible the better I shall like them."

Madame Simon was only too well pleased to comply, as her tongue had but little chance of exercise in the winter, except in rating the maids, or keeping her rosy-cheeked spouse in order. She sat down at Ralph's invitation, and poured out a budgetful.

There was the old miser who had his hoard in a cave of Mount Pilate, and let his grandchildren starve to death whilst he was counting his louis-dors. He was murdered by bandits, who stole his hoard, and left him, as an example to misers in the future, tied to a stake in the mountain side, where the vultures picked his bones, and the roaring winds shook his skeleton to pieces.

There was the murderer who was driven out of the village, and wandered about the mountains, living on berries and wild pears as long as summer and autumn lasted. When the winter came, and every drop of water was turned to ice, and every herb or berry hidden under three feet of snow, the priest found him one morning, when he went to early mass, lying on the altar-steps, frozen and starved, icicles a yard long hanging from his beard, his face, shrunk and withered, turned as if in a last wild prayer to the cross he had spurned in life.

"You can see his grave now, monsieur, in the corner of the churchyard. Father Antoine says a mass for the peace of his soul once a-year for nothing. Ah! but the Father is the best man that ever had a flock to look after."

"Perhaps he's afraid of the man's ghost troubling him if he doesn't," remarked Ralph, with a cynical smile.

The thought haunted him that if these good people could find out his loathsome secret he might be hunted out in the icy snow like the nameless murderer.

When he was tired of weird stories, he asked a great many questions about the natural features of the country round.

"We suffer much from the cold, and a drop of water is worth its weight in gold. In summer we can't get it without much trouble because the springs are dry and in the winter because they are frozen," said Madame, preparing to go, as she thought of the dinner.

Ralph's face grew thoughtful, as if he were solving a difficulty.

"I suppose the ice is thick on all your lakes, madame?"

"In general, monsieur; but this winter is so mild. You might draw a cannon across the ice and not break it, if it were like last year; but they tell me there is only a thin coating on the Devil's Saucepan. There are hot springs, you see, from the old volcanoes, and it is the only place where the deer have a chance of quenching their thirst. Would monsieur like an omelette for his *déjeuner*?"

Monsieur would like an omelette, and something more solid, in the shape of meat, and a bottle of Burgundy.

About three o'clock in the afternoon he sallied out. On his way he looked in at the bright little kitchen, and asked the shortest way to the top of Mount Pilate.

"Monsieur will not go there at this time of day?" Madame Simon asked, in horror. "It really is not safe—the path is slippery, and the night will be upon us before you know it."

"Make your mind easy; I'm only going to take a look round."

"Take Pierre with you, monsieur," pointing to a curly-headed boy, with a sharp sallow face and intelligent eyes.

"Thanks, I'm an unsociable fellow, and prefer to be alone. Prepare that curious dish you mentioned for my dinner—I might be ravenous. *Au revoir!*"

Replacing his cap on his head, he walked out into the shower of sleet with a shiver.

Whilst Madame, left to herself, reflected that, considering the amount the English gentleman seemed to have eaten at luncheon, when more than half the bacon and a large part of the loaf had vanished, and only a quarter of the omelette returned downstairs, she had better prepare not one dish alone, but a dinner of several courses to satisfy the foreigner's inordinate appetite.

It was late when, after toiling up a steep pathway, Ralph Armitage, struggling against wind and chilling sleet, at last reached the place of water which had earned the sobriquet of the Devil's Saucepan.

It was a curious place—a hollow cut out of the hard grey rock, which rose weird and awful on every side.

The hollow was filled with water of fathomless depth; the water was covered with a thin sheet of ice, like a piece of silver paper thrown over a vault of death.

The scream of a night hawk, the roar of the raging wind, were the only sounds.

Ralph Armitage, white as the snow, stood and shivered, whilst thoughts of life and death followed quick on each other's heels through his troubled mind.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LORD BELFEATHER IS TOO GOOD.

THE Haymarket Theatre was crowded from gallery to pit. There was not a vacant seat in the house, for it was the first night of a new piece, and public curiosity had been stirred to an unusual extent by the circulation of various rumours about the leading characters of the drama. Some people whispered that well known personages of modern society were hit off to the life. This was quite enough to fill the stalls and the boxes; others maintained that the piece would be a genuine success, the best production of a favourite author, which sent a crowd to all the other available places.

In a box on the grand tier sat Lady Stapleton, Violet Sartoris, and Mr. and Mrs. Landon. Many eyes were drawn in their direction, and ardent glances shot through opera-glasses, for Violet was looking as lovely as ever, and Mabel like the sweetest of blush roses. Their toilettes were very simple, Mabel in white, and Violet in softest grey; but they had an air which only belongs to those of good birth, and they attracted so much admiration, possibly because they did not look out for it.

"May I come?" was telegraphed as plainly as possible by the young Marquis of Belfeather, and was answered by a smile and a flutter of a fan, which brought him as surely as a beckoning hand in the course of a few minutes to the back of Violet's chair.

There he took up his post and never left it, rather to the disgust of Cyril, who had meant to have a long chat with his old friend. He had taken a small house in Chester-street, Belgravia, and had already formed countless plans, in which both Violet and Mabel were to take a part. These were to be discussed in the intervals between the acts, and Belfeather was decidedly *de trop*.

Lady Jane, looking radiantly happy, as if she had just had an offer from the man she loved, or heard she had been left an enormous legacy, was in a box on the opposite side. A smile hovered about her lips as she sat there, and her eyes glittered as if with triumph.

Bertie Mayne would have watched her narrowly and said that she was decidedly up to mischief, only, unfortunately, he was enjoying himself immensely at a bachelor dinner at his club, and Lady Jane was safe from his vigilance.

Cyril was too absolutely pure-minded to suspect her capable of playing such an odious part as she had already with regard to Violet, or else he would have kept his eye upon her, and perhaps been startled by her expression. She looked as different as possible from the dejected Lady Jane, whose actions Bertie Mayne had submitted to a surgical examination.

There was a colour in her cheeks, not brought there by the blush of shame, a light in her eyes, that made them sparkle with unusual brilliancy.

She expressed herself delighted with the play, as well as with the acting, and made none of those carping remarks, in which she generally let off some of the bitterness of her spirit.

Lady Oldthorpe's worn face relaxed into a pleased expression under her daughter's influence, and she unbent to a certain extent with regard to the millionaire whom Lady Jane liked to reserve as the last trump to be played only in case of an emergency.

"Mrs. Sartoris, I'm going abroad," said Lord Belfeather in a judiciously modified tone, which yet could not quite be designated a whisper. "Have you any particular direction in which you wish me to turn my travels?"

"How could I? Only enjoy yourself as much as you can, and come back some day to tell us all about it."

"You don't understand!" and he looked vexed

at his effort being taken for a mere pleasure-trip, when he was really doing something that was quite unselfish. "Have you forgotten the commission you gave me at The Willows?"

"Oh! Lord Belfeather, you are too good!" with a little catch in her breath. "No, don't think of me, or bother yourself about it. It is quite hopeless, and I can do nothing but wait."

"Wait, and waste the best part of your life! No, that you shan't if I can help it," he said, in suppressed excitement. "Men addicted to sport are always knocking up against each other. I've friends in all parts of the world, shooting tigers, or grizzlies, or wild boars. I'll write to the whole lot, and tell them to keep their eyes open for your husband, and I'll start on my own hook as well. Only look happy when I come back," with his winning smile; "that is all I ask."

"No, Lord Belfeather. I'm not a monster of selfishness. I—I really can't allow it," struggling for composure.

"You wouldn't hurt me so cruelly! Well, I'll ask something else as a reward, and then you shall see that I am selfish as usual."

"Ah! if you could only tell me of something I could do for you in return."

"Call me Belfeather when I come back," in the lowest of tones; "and consider me your friend."

"With all my heart. Oh! Heaven grant you success," with trembling lips. "You remember what I said at The Willows?"

"Every word."

"There was no reason, tell him that. But what am I saying! Of course, you mustn't go. What would the Duchess say?"

"She would be delighted. Her one hobby is travelling. She says it opens the mind. Now, if she said the purse, I'd quite agree with her."

"Think of all you would have to give up!"

"It is better that I should go," his voice scarcely audible. "I—I might find my way so often to Brook-street that I might become a bore."

She looked into his boyish face, intending to flash a swift denial, but she saw such fond and earnest admiration in his eyes that her lashes dropped on burning cheeks, and the words remained unsaid. And yet this boy was noble enough to start on a hopeless quest after her husband!

"Have you no other commissions for me?" he said, lightly, the next moment. "I've a wonderful eye for a pretty bonnet; and as to gloves, no one can cheat me. Are you ill?" in a sudden tone of alarm.

She leant back in her chair, white and nerveless. The thought of a real active search for her husband, with the wild hope that it excited in her heart, was too much for her. Her heart throbbed at a galloping pace, and then seemed to stand still, whilst the bright lights in the chandeliers appeared to come nearer and nearer to her eyes.

"Let me take you out. You want a breath of air," said Cyril, who was always on the watch to do her a service. He helped her to rise, then drew her hand through his arm, whilst the Marquis opened the door.

"My dear child, aren't you well? I'll come with you," and Lady Stapleton got up quickly from her chair with an expression of great concern, whilst Mabel caught up Violet's cloak and handed it to her husband, asking him at the same time if she shouldn't come, too?

Violet would not hear of their being disturbed. She would be all right in a minute; she begged them to stay to please her. But when she attempted to walk she found her legs so shaky, and her head so queer, that home and quiet were the only things she longed for. The Marquis flew on in front to find the carriage or secure a cab, whilst Cyril followed more slowly with Violet. He was wondering what it was that could have upset her.

Belfeather, for a young man—and a tolerably new acquaintance—had been talking with unusual earnestness, and Violet had listened with rapt attention.

Cyril could have betted half-a-million that she not tell him one smallest particular about the plot of the play.

It was strange, and it disturbed him in his chosen character of faithful watch-dog.

First, there was that fellow St. John, who gained such an extraordinary influence over her, and this boy seemed to be following rapidly in the same line.

Had those terrible bouts of brain-fever changed her disposition entirely? He contrasted her present ways with the life of absolute seclusion at the Priory. Then she would not even ask him to stay for a friendly dinner; now she was ready to receive anybody.

True, she was now living under her aunt's chaperonage, which made all the difference; but the wish for solitude had gone, as well as that proud standing aloof from the world which he used to think made her so superior to the rest of her sex.

Though these thoughts were fretting him at the moment, his manner to her was as gentle and tender as possible.

He stood before her to shield her from the draught, looking down with kindly eyes into her white face to see if she were better, but taking care not to fidget her with constant questions.

There were plenty of people about, and the doors were continually opening and shutting again with a loud slam. Many amused glances were cast in their direction, and one young masher nudged another with the remark,—

"I'm dashed if that isn't a regular case of spoons!"

Cyril heard it, and glared at the speaker, but at the same time Belfeather came hurrying back, quite out of breath, to say that he couldn't see the carriage anywhere, so had been obliged to secure a four-wheeler.

"Lady Stapleton's carriage!" cried the hoarse voice of a linkman.

"I gave the name of Stapleton—thought it as well," whispered the Marquis.

Violet was handed into the cab, Cyril took his place beside her. Belfeather shut the door, darted one glance of envy at her escort, raised his hat, and went back into the theatre, having promised to see after the others.

A heavy sigh, followed by a muttered curse, broke from a man who was passing,—

"And that is the woman whom I fancied disconsolate!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"WOULD I WERE A GIRL!"

"Now, my dear Violet, I insist upon your enjoying yourself to-night!" said Lady Stapleton, with a cheerful smile. "You are to forget everything that is unpleasant. You are to fancy yourself a girl again. You may flirt if you like, just for once, if you will promise not to go too far, and you are absolutely to dance every dance."

"Auntie, what are you thinking of!"

"Of you, child! I want that harum-scarum boy, Lord Belfeather, to enjoy his last evening in England; I want poor old Cyril to be re-assured as to your lively proclivities; I want you to prove to the world that you are not a broken-hearted, deserted woman," her tone growing grave.

"But supposing I am!" with a deep sigh.

"I'm not going to suppose anything of the kind," briskly. "You are young, you are not in debt, you are immensely admired—what more can the heart of woman desire!"

"Oh! nothing, of course," with an inward glance at her own desolate heart, which told her that a woman wanted love more than all the rest—love which gives the glory of the dawn to the saddest and poorest of lives.

"Don't encourage Belfeather too much; remember the boy is not made of anything else than flesh and blood; and don't forget that an old friend may seem quite as dangerous to those who don't understand the position as the newest of acquaintances."

"Why this lecture? Have I done anything wrong?" looking up in surprise.

"No, my dear; only I told Cyril once that I wished he were ugly, and perhaps I should have more peace of mind if you were marked with the small-pox."

"Thank Heaven, I'm not!" and Violet laughed softly.

Beauty is a possession that often brings the owner into difficulties, and throws many obstacles into her way; but the woman does not exist who would willingly give it away to secure herself from all perils and temptations.

"So I'm to be a girl to-night!" Violet said to herself, as she stood before the long mirror, in which her own fair image was reflected. "Let me fancy myself free—my name still Mayne—my heart as light as it used to be when Gertrude and I played at being ballet-dancers in the nursery at home. It seems centuries ago, and how much I have lived through since then!" ending her smile with a sigh.

Her dress that night was white, ornamented with heartsease, shaded from violet to mauve, and graduated from the size of an ordinary saucer to that of a half-crown.

They looked exceedingly pretty amongst the folds of exquisite white lace, and there was a slight tinge of pink in her softly rounded cheeks which gave the finishing touch to her beauty.

Ralph Armitage was to be there, for Lady Stapleton in common courtesy could not leave him out; but both Belfeather and Cyril Landon had promised to act as bodyguard to the "queen of the evening," and he was not to be allowed a single chance of a *tête à-tête*.

Other partners were to be ruthlessly sacrificed for the sake of keeping this pledge; and any amount of men would have been willing to do the same, for Violet's face was enough to bewilder both hearts and brains.

Lady Jane had delayed her brother by telling him the wrong number of the house where she had been dining, and as it was in one of those interminable streets in South Kensington, and nobody seemed to know even a next-door neighbour, he had been obliged to drive from one end of the street to the other, whilst the footman knocked at every door in succession. His temper had not been sublime to begin with; but he was in a positive fury by the time the right house was actually found; and his sister, perfectly unconscious of the trick she had played him, came out to him with a laughing remark about the time. He answered her savagely, with a loud, fierce oath, which made her shiver. She knew that he used to swear when something tried him almost beyond endurance, but he always considered it caddish to do so before a lady.

And now it was a sign that something had changed him terribly for the worse. What could it be? He had never been quite the same since that day when he stayed behind her for a few hours at the Priory; but it was the visit to Holly Bank which had seemed to have such disastrous consequences. He went there an ordinary English gentleman, a decent sort of brother, a tolerably pleasant companion. He came back a morose savage, without a civil word for anybody, not even for his only sister.

Was it a hopeless love that had altered him, or was there some terrible secret, as she often fancied as she watched his haggard face, and saw his convulsive start at the most ordinary sounds, such as a sudden knock at the door, or also a violent ring at the bell?

These thoughts came pressing on her against her will as she sat by his side in angry silence. She had apologised humbly for her mistake, and the apology had been so ungraciously received that she had said nothing since.

The long silence, and her unpleasant thoughts, made the way seem endless; and yet, before, she had felt such happiness from a secret source, which she had revealed to no one, that she could almost have sung with joy.

The first person to welcome the brother and sister was Mr. Bertie Mayne, who received them looking as simple and innocent as the white rose in his button-hole. The colour rushed into Lady Jane's cheeks as she remembered her last conversation with him, and she made a dart at Lady Stapleton, who was standing near the door in a sumptuous violet velvet.

"Had good sport?" inquired Bertie, as if on malice intent, although he knew nothing of that

Surtees' programme, while Wilmington obtained Miss Cliff's, and scored up largely on it, while Jim brought up some of the military contingent whom he knew to his sister, and then went off to seek a certain young lady who was like a delicate piece of Dresden china in her dainty fairness, and who had bewitched him three years before.

Brownie tried to talk merrily to her partners—tried to appear gay and happy—but her heart was like lead in her bosom, and she felt much more inclined to cry than to smile.

After a while she grew tired of the music and dancing, the merry laughter and joyful badinage, and crept away to a little room at the end of the corridor, which she knew would be vacant.

The long French windows were open. The heavy scent of roses and languorous perfume of lilies floated in.

The cool air seemed to invite her to go out. It was so hot in the house.

She felt feverish and restless, and, indifferent to the fact that she had nothing on her shoulders and arms, she stepped out on the balcony, and stood leaning against the balustrade, dreamily watching the star-spangled sky.

She had been there some time when she was startled by the sound of a familiar voice coming from the room. It was Lady Surtees', and, starting forward, she saw her standing by Cyril's side, looking up at him with all her mad, unholy passion shining in her eyes.

Brownie stood as though turned to stone, crouched in the shadow of the wall. The power of volition seemed to leave her, and every word that was said struck distinctly on her shrinking ear.

"Yes, I love you," her ladyship was saying, "with all my heart and soul and strength."

"Lady Surtees!" exclaimed Sutherland, amazedly.

"Don't pretend to be shocked," she went on, half-mockingly. "I know how wrong it is."

"It is worse than wrong," he interrupted, sternly.

"Let it be as bad as it can," she retorted, sullenly, "I cannot help it."

"You should help it. Think of your husband."

"No, I will not think of him!" she cried, furiously. "I loathe, abhor, detest him! What is he to me? A drag, a clog; a torture to me, for he stands between me and my happiness. Oh, Cyril!" she went on, frantically, clasping her hands round his arm in her desperate earnestness, "do not let the tie that binds me to a man I detest separate us. Do not let it stand in the way of our happiness—our mutual joy!"

"You do not know what you are saying. For Heaven's sake calm yourself!"

"Calm myself! How can I be calm when I am with you? My blood runs like lava through my veins. My pulses beat like sledge-hammers. My brain whirls. I am mad—mad!"

"I think you must be," muttered her companion.

"Take me away, Cyril," she went on, her breast heaving stormily, the diamonds on it flashing and sparkling at each hurried respiration, "take me away. I can never go back to Reginald. I will give up all for you, willingly—joyfully."

"Lady Surtees, you are mistaken," he said in cold, decisive tones that struck like the blow of a knife on the wretched, guilty woman's heart. "I do not love you, and I have not the slightest intention in the world of doing your husband an injury by running away with you."

"You do not love me!" she gasped, her face paling to a ghastly grey hue.

"No, I am not a scoundrel. I do not make love to other men's wives. You have mistaken the attentions I have shown you."

"I have indeed," she said, bitterly, loosening her hold on his arm, and speaking slowly and with difficulty. "For—whom—then—do you care?"

"I thought you knew," he said, throwing a keen glance at her agonised ashy face.

"No," she replied, faintly; "you have not made me the confidante of your love affairs."

"The only woman I ever have loved or ever can love," he said coldly and somewhat cruelly, "is Brownie Barrington."

"Ah!" she wrung her hands in silence, for the cup of her terrible shame and humiliation was full. To have offered herself to this man like a wanton, and then to be told that he loved another!

"Let me order a carriage for you," he suggested, a touch of pity mingling with his indignation as he noted her anguish. "You will not care to go back to the ball-room."

"No; I shall not care to go back there. Get me a carriage as soon as you can," and declining his proffered arm, she rose and swept out of the room beside him, and ten minutes later was driving back to Whitebrook in the carriage of a late arrived guest, while Cyril was threading his way back to the ball-room, full of perplexity and sorrow for the miserable woman whom he had just seen drive away, and for himself, because he believed Brownie was engaged to Wilmington.

The ball-room seemed to have overflowed, for here and there, in convenient nooks and corners, were couples flirting and enjoying themselves immensely. The young master of the Abbey cannoned against a gentleman with a lady on his arm in the corridor, and stopping to apologise, saw that it was Wilmington.

"Congratulate me, Sutherland," said that individual gleefully; "this lady has consented to make me happy."

Cyril raised his eyes slowly, expecting to see Brownie, and they rested on Jenny Cliff's freckled and blushing face.

"Jenny!" he cried, thoroughly astounded, "is it Jenny you are going to marry?"

"Yes. Why are you so much astonished?"

"I thought it was Brownie," he blurted out in his joy and delight.

"Miss Barrington does not care for me," said Wilfrid significantly, "though I was told she did."

"Who told you that?" asked Sutherland sternly.

"Lady Surtees."

"Ah! I understand."

And like a flash the whole situation revealed itself to his eyes. In her mad infatuation Lady Surtees had hesitated at nothing and had lied and prevaricated all round to separate him from his love.

With a hearty, if silent, imprecation against her ladyship, he made haste to offer his warm congratulations, and then hurried off to look for Brownie. He found her sitting demurely by her mother looking more like his little love of old than she had done for some time. The rich red colour leapt to her cheeks as he stood before her and asked in his usual way for a dance.

"You can have this," she told him, shyly, looking up at him with love-lit eyes, as he towered above her, tall, handsome, strong.

Without a word he put his arm round her waist and swung her away to the voluptuous strains of the valse. When it was over he led her to a cool dim corner of the huge conservatory.

"Brownie," he whispered softly, his lips close to her ear, "will you, can you forgive me?"

"Yes, Cyril," she answered gently, "I can, for it was all a mistake."

"My mistake," he said quickly, "for I ought to have known you would not care for a fellow like Wilmington. It was all my fault."

"Not all, Cyril. I was very jealous of Allanore."

"You had not the slightest cause to be, my pet," he told her very earnestly, possessing himself of both her hands.

"I know that now—for—for Cyril——"

"Yes, my dearest."

"I was out on the balcony when you were in the red room with—her."

"Brownie! then you heard all that unfortunate woman said!"

"Yes. I could not help it. I seemed turned to stone and could not escape."

"Then you know, darling, that I am true to you, yours alone?"

"Yes, and I can't think now, Cyril, how I ever could have doubted you."

"You owe me some reparation for that," he smiled tenderly.

"What shall I do to make up?" she asked, looking at him with a spark of the old mischief gleaming in her gipsy eyes.

"Marry me this day month," he said audaciously, taking her in his arms, and her answer seemed to content him, for he laid his cheek on hers and gave vent to a sigh of intense satisfaction.

[THE END.]

We are inclined to pity the Puritan little one of New England who knows nothing about merry Christmastide, with its rollicking games of blind man's buff, hunt the slipper, snapdragon, and the like, but some of them enjoyed the practice which they called "burning the Christmas candle." This taper was a home-made affair, and differed from other tallow dips only in being larger and having the wick divided at the lower end to form three legs, while at its heart was concealed a quill well filled with gunpowder. On Christmas Eve it was lighted, and the quaint little Puritan folk sat around telling stories and riddles until suddenly the candle went off with a tremendous explosion, making a delightful excitement and giving the children of the colonies their only taste of uproarious holiday fun.

The Sultan of Turkey spends £1 000 a day for his table, and this does not include grand State dinners or other elaborate functions. It is simply his Majesty's everyday *régime*. He takes his meals alone, and not in any particular room, but wherever he happens to be—in the palace, or garden, or private park. Silver dishes, which are sealed up, are used entirely for serving the meals. These are covered with velvet covers to keep the contents warm, and the procession of servants, consisting of perhaps a hundred persons, starts for the spot where the Sultan happens to be. The table, which is of silver, is the first thing borne in the procession. A ladleful of the food from each vessel is first taken by the Imperial Taster; the Grand Chamberlain takes a spoonful, the Sultan watching the operation, and finally commencing his meal.

One of the chief pearl fisheries of the world is that of Thursday Island, which lies eighteen miles from Cape York, the northernmost point of Australia. The population of the whole island is not more than fifteen hundred, a true assembly of the nations, for here are men of every race and colour of the earth. The large majority are, however, Japanese. The pearl fishing is carried on by a fleet of two hundred and thirty "shelling luggers," varying in size from ten to fifteen tons. There are generally seven men to each boat—the diver, the tender, who holds the life line and sees that all is done to insure the safety of the diver, and five men who work the air pump that is placed in the hold of the vessel, and supplies the diver with fresh air. Most of the divers and sailors are Japanese or Malays, few Europeans caring to risk their lives in the work, for it is very dangerous.

The instant the Kaiser hears of some new and important discovery in science, or that a burning controversy is raging on a knotty point in art or literature, the leading professors, and all qualified to speak with authority, are invited to the Palace, in order that the question may be discussed in his presence. The guests assemble at a given hour in the Kaiserin's library, a cosy apartment, the walls of which are lined with literary treasures. On the large table in the centre are laid out in readiness all works of reference, &c., dealing with the subject of the evening, while there are always plenty of atlases and albums containing reproductions from all the galleries and museums in the world. No time is lost in frivolous conversation, the Kaiser almost invariably opening the discussion at once with a pithy query. If demonstrations are to be given those present remain standing, in order to see better; but, as a rule, all are invited to seat themselves, the members of the suite pointing out their places to them. Tea, seltzer-water and beer are handed round at intervals; and generally the Kaiser lights a cigar, but out of consideration for the Kaiserin merely takes a whiff now and then.

ON THE PEKING WALL.

A THRILLING episode of the siege of the legations is described in the December *Century*, by W. N. Pethick, Secretary to Li Hung Chang. Mr. Pethick is an American, and writes from the American point of view:—

On the night of July 3, at the close of the fourteenth day of the siege of the Peking legations, a thrilling incident occurred involving the fate of the Europeans and Americans—a struggle the issue of which was awaited with agonizing suspense by the thousand men, women, and children who would be speedily butchered in case of failure, for the enemy was General Tung Fuhsiang, once a Mahommedan rebel chief, who, with his bloodthirsty horde of bandit soldiers, had sworn to exterminate foreigners, and had now gained a free hand against us in Peking. . . .

At dusk on that evening the Chinese began their final approach by building out from one end of their nearest breastwork a brick wall curving outward into the bastion to avoid our direct fire, and heading for the end of our barricade; it was really connecting the ends of two hostile breastworks by a semicircular wall. The work was done silently and quickly; bricks were pushed forward from behind cover and piled up without exposing the workers. From their loopholes our men could see this terrible wall grow higher and nearer, and knew that they would soon be exposed to a plunging fire from high above them and from their flank. They felt helpless, and were still under the influence of former panics, which arose from overestimating the value of Chinese soldiers and being too much impressed by mere numbers without courage. They accepted the theory that "the position is untenable"—a phrase with which they had become too familiar from the lips of one of their own officers.

At length, after dark, the reserve rations were brought down into the legation, and it became known that the American position on the wall was to be abandoned. The hour of trial had come. Our dispirited men were about to let go their stronghold. Before morning the whole south wall would be lined with savage enemies, whose musketry would soon be followed by artillery fire raking all the legations from end to end. The terrible fate of hundreds of women and children, of the helpless in the hospital, the aged and feeble, and finally of the thin line of defenders—all this, and the finishing work of the sword, passed through the minds of those who waited without hope.

But the hour produced the man. To Herbert G. Squiers, First Secretary of the United States Legation at Peking, late First Lieutenant of the Seventh United States Cavalry, belongs the merit of saving this deplorable situation. His training in a branch of the army service where promptness and energy are especially necessary, and his two years' careful study of Chinese character and institutions, had fitted him for the needs of this trying time. . . .

For this important service, as well as for the capacity he had shown from the first, Major Sir Claude Macdonald, the British Minister, who had been selected by all the nationalities present here to be commander-in-chief of our little force, paid Mr. Squiers the compliment of appointing him chief of staff. When Sir Claude parted with his staff at the end of the siege, he handed to Mr. Squiers the following letter:—

PEKING, August 18, 1900.

My dear Squiers,—A few lines to thank you most heartily for the excellent and loyal support which you have at all times given me during the siege. That it has been brought to so successful an issue is very largely due to your ability and foresight, and I only hope that if ever I am in a tight hole it may be my good fortune to have so good a man to turn to.

In your son I found a most efficient and gallant A.D.C., whose coolness under fire was the admiration of everybody.

FLOWER OF FATE.

—:o:—

CHAPTER XXII.

"ANICE!" repeated Madge, startled; "is she not in her room?"

"I can find her nowhere, every light is out downstairs. I sent her a note early in the evening to say I should be late, and might perhaps not return till the morning; but I managed to get my business done more quickly than I thought, and then hurried home."

Every nerve in his body was quivering; it went to Madge's heart to see him trembling like a woman.

"You have missed her somewhere," she said, with forced lightness. "I daresay Anice is sitting in one of the bedrooms chatting and forgetting how late it is. I will go and see."

She moved towards the door with a tender smile, but Sir Keith stopped her.

"No, Madge, dear, don't go to these strangers; my pride rebels from letting them see my weakness, and I will not show them that I am scared by such a slight thing as this."

He sank heavily in a chair as he spoke.

"And yet," he went on, slowly; "I have been weighed down all day by the most terrible presentiment of coming sorrow. Worse—shame, try as I would I could not beat it off."

"You are tired, Keith, dear, that is all. Now sit there while I go and find Anice; she can't be very far."

Madge bent and kissed her brother softly; a vague, sharp pain shot through her breast as she saw the dark shadow on his fair, frank face; he clasped her hand and rose.

"No, I will come with you. Perhaps she is with Dunmoor."

They turned away together, and as they reached the door something tried to flit past them with a stifled exclamation.

Sir Keith strode forward and grasped the small black-robed figure by the shoulder.

"Anice!" he said, and his voice sounded stern and hard as iron, "Where have you been? What are you doing here?"

"Keith!" faltered Lady Anice; then as she caught sight of Madge her fear gave way to anger. "How dare you pry on me in this way?" she flashed; "it is disgraceful that you permit it, Keith."

"Madge has not attempted to pry on you, Anice. Answer my question. Where have you been? What is the meaning of this hurry and fright?"

"I am not frightened. Don't be so idiotic, Keith. I went down to—to see if you had come home, that's all."

Sir Keith gazed at the pretty craven face; his heart suddenly sickened as he read the lie on every lineament, his hand dropped from her shoulder.

"Go!" he said, in a stifled way; "I shall ask no more questions."

He moved abruptly from her, and before Madge or she could answer, strode hurriedly across the landing to the staircase, his wife gazing after him with a look of horror growing on her face.

"You must not stand there, you will be tired, Anice," Madge was beginning, gently, when Lady Anice, drawing her cloak round her, glided after her husband.

"He must not go, he must not go!" she whispered, in a wild, reckless way.

Madge stood leaning against her door, her heart was beating in a heavy, painful fashion. Doubt, suspicion, fear, crowded her brain; she scarcely knew where she was. Suddenly a confused muffled sound reached her ears; then came a shriek, and then silence.

Madge was paralysed for that instant; a cold perspiration broke out on her brow, her limbs trembled beneath her. Then there seemed to come voices, questions, from every corner, and the landing was crowded with forms.

Lord Dunmoor strode towards Madge.

"What is it?" he asked, hurriedly, seeing her white face.

His answer was given by his sister.

Lady Anice staggered up the stairs, her hands gesticulating wildly, her hair disordered.

"Part them! part them!" she gasped, feebly. "He will be killed! Keith will be——"

The rest faded away in a moan, and, as Madge rushed to clasp her hand, Lady Anice sank to the ground insensible.

Lord Dunmoor, followed by nearly all the frightened guests, ran down the stairs; and Madge, though her blood seemed frozen in her veins, tottered after them, conscious that a low, sneering laugh followed her.

"My revenge has come, Keith Moretoun! come at last!"

The Countess de Ganyani gazed down with a look of triumph at Lady Anice's senseless form, and, as she passed, she slightly spurned it with her foot.

Madge stood clinging to the banisters, conscious that some hideous work was going on round her, but hearing, seeing nothing clearly.

The assembled people were massed round those two forms locked in a deadly struggle.

Strong man as he was, Keith Moretoun was getting the worst of it, for his opponent was cool and collected, while he was mad with shame and misery.

"Moretoun! Keith! for Heaven's sake, man! listen to me! Do you hear!" and Lord Dunmoor gripped his brother-in-law by the arm, and, by almost superhuman strength tore him away. "What does this mean!" he went on, hurriedly. "Prince, can you give us no explanation? Keith, old fellow, speak!"

The Prince smiled. It was not a pleasant smile, and rearranged his collar.

But it was not he who answered; a woman's voice rang out clearly,—

"Sir Keith is avenging his wife's honour. The Prince cannot deny he is Lady Anice's most favoured lover."

The blood rushed to Lord Dunmoor's face, the veins on his forehead swelled, his hand gripped Keith's arm convulsively.

"Woman, you lie!" he muttered, huskily.

Sir Keith seemed suddenly dazed; he dropped into a chair, his head sunken on his breast like an old man.

With a broken sob Madge left the stairs and knelt beside him.

"Lie! Oh, no, Lord Dunmoor! I am speaking the truth! Where have your eyes been, man, that you have not seen it before! It has been common talk these weeks past!"

Madge rose suddenly to her feet.

"Are you a woman, or a fiend," she said, in a voice, choked with emotion, "that you should glory like this in another's shame! Lord Dunmoor, go to your sister, she needs your aid. Pity her, as I do, for what was she but a tool in the hands of these adventurers! You, madam prepare to leave the house at once!"

She turned to the group of servants hustled in a corner, and spoke to the butler,—

"Collins, see that a carriage is got ready at once. Send some of the maids up to assist the Countess de Ganyani."

"I do not intend to leave till morning," cried the Countess, boldly.

"You go now, without an instant's delay," was Madge's answer, given quietly, "or the servants shall drive you from the house you have desecrated too long with your presence."

The Prince stood silent, his eyes full of admiration and fire at the dignity in this slender girl.

A smile of contempt passed over his face as he saw his confederate pale before the menacing looks of the servants, and then pass rapidly up the stairs.

Madge turned, as the Countess disappeared, to the rest of the guests,—

"Pray retire!" she said, with a very faint smile. "You must all be tired. Everything will be quiet now for the night, I trust!"

One of the ladies held out her hand, sympathetically.

"Let me stay with you, my dear," she said.

But Madge shook her head.

"You are very good! We are better alone."

So each one, with a heart full of pity for the

man sunk in a stupor from grief and shame, went back, to whisper over the disgrace that had fallen on the Moretoun's life in the seclusion of their bedrooms.

The servants slowly withdrew, and all that remained in the huge hall, dimly lighted by the rays of the moon, were Sir Keith and his sister, and the tall figure of the Prince de Boules.

Madge knelt down again by the chair, and put her arms round that curiously silent figure, but Sir Keith made no response to her tender caress; he sat on in the same dull, almost sullen fashion.

The Prince had sufficient delicacy to keep his lips sealed, though the love he had always felt for Madge struggled hard within him to tell her how great had been his disgust at the work set to his hand. Yet he knew that his conduct could be cleansed by no excuse, and that to her he must ever appear the most contemptible and odious of men.

Lord Dunmoor came back in a few moments.

"I have carried Anice to her room," he said curtly, and even in the moonlight Madge saw the haggard look that had come on his face. "We must get Keith away."

"I cannot move him—he seems turned to stone. Oh, Lord Dunmoor, thank Heaven you are here to-night!"

"I wish I had been dead before this shame came to me," he answered, his voice hoarse with emotion. "My poor mother! And Keith—what has he done that he should have been wronged so terribly?"

"We must get him away from here; I don't like this strange calmness. I fear for his brain."

Even as Madge whispered this Sir Keith slowly lifted his ashen face, and, putting one cold hand on Lord Dunmoor's arm, rose to his feet. As he stood upright his gaze fell upon the tall form of his wife's lover."

"Dunmoor," he said faintly, "tell the Prince de Boules I demand satisfaction without delay."

"When and where you will," replied the Prince, speaking for the first time.

"At seven, in the garden."

"You will remain here till then," added Lord Dunmoor. "The choice of weapons is with you."

"Pistols. If you have none I can supply the want. I never travel without them."

The Prince's tone was calmness itself.

Madge shuddered.

As the two men moved away she followed, tears rolling down her cheeks, and when Sir Keith was in his study she put her arms round him tenderly once again, and buried her face on his breast.

"Keith, my brother!" was all she said, but it went to his heart, pierced through the agony of shame and pain he was enduring.

"Dunmoor," he said, gently. "I leave Madge to your care—she—and—and—your sister. I need add nothing more. Go now, my darling—my brave, sweet, pure sister; you are worn out. This terrible night has almost aged you. Dunmoor, take her away."

"Let me stay with you, Keith. Oh, let me stay!" pleaded Madge, brokenly.

Sir Keith bent forward and kissed her brow.

"May Heaven bless and keep you always, Madge," he prayed, softly. Then, as he released her hand, he said quietly, "Go now, dear; I must be alone."

Madge turned away, tears raining from her eyes. She would have faltered and stumbled but for Lord Dunmoor's firm hold.

"Oh, Heaven spare him!" was the cry in her heart. "He is so young to die."

Lord Dunmoor almost carried her upstairs, and as he reached her door he said, gently,—

"Promise me you will rest? I will do everything that is necessary, believe me."

"I cannot rest. I can do nothing but think that in a few short hours Keith may be dead. Oh, Lord Dunmoor, must this duel be? Is there no escape?"

"None," he answered, grimly. "It is the only way to avenge dishonour."

With that he left her.

Madge sank on to a chair. She heard the footsteps of the servants carrying down the trunks of the Countess and her daughter. She heard the low, sneering laugh of the woman who had twice darkened her brother's life.

She seemed to see at this moment the cruel plot that had been made on Keith's happiness and honour, and realised how success had been brought about through Anice's vanity and heartlessness.

She forgot her own sorrow in this terrible one that had fallen on her brother; yet Rex Darnley's image would come, and a sigh rose easily as she pictured his future life mixed with such revolting, fiendish cruelty as combined in the person of the Comtesse de Ganyani.

The night wore on. To Madge it seemed as if a century of years stretched between the evening and now. The clock on her mantel-shelf chimed each hour, and the summer dawn crept slowly over the face of night—still she never moved.

Scene by scene of the suffering and pain she had endured in her young life came to her in this terrible vigil.

"Is is hard to say," she mused—"hard to say that all is for the best. Am I never—never to taste real happiness? Keith has just been given to me, and before many hours are passed he may be snatched away. If he is spared what will be his life? His heart is broken now. Ah! try as I may fate is against me—I am a blossom of that sorrowful plant!"

At six o'clock a slight tap came to the door. She rose with a shudder. Was it the knell already of her brother's death?

As she turned the handle a figure crept in, a frail form with ashen face, white lips, and eyes so strange and full of fear that for a moment all likeness seemed vanished.

"Anice!" murmured Madge.

"Let me come to you. I cannot stay alone."

Lady Anice's voice was thick and husky, her small hands locked tremblingly together. "I shall go mad if I stay in that room an instant longer."

Madge felt a wave of pity pass through her. This was not the flaunting, heartless, sneering coquette she had known so well; it was a woman, full of mental suffering, a woman whom sorrow had never visited before.

"Come in," she said, gently; "rest there."

She pushed forward an easy chair, but Lady Anice shook her head. She went feebly across to the window, and stood with the sweet, fresh morning air blowing in on her fevered brow. Madge's pity grew greater each moment, though the memory of her brother's shame and agony fought hard against it.

After a moment Anice turned.

"Tell me," she said, feverishly, "what has happened. I must know."

There was almost a return of the old masterful spirit in the last words.

Madge leaned against the wainscot; she was stiff with sitting, and felt suddenly languid and weak.

"In one hour Keith will fight the Prince de Boules."

Lady Anice gave a cry of anguish.

"Fight—oh!—no! no! no! Madge, they must not. I am not worth it. Oh! if I could undo all my foolishness. I see how wicked I have been. Madge, dear—dear Madge!" she moved across and flung herself on her knees before Madge, "do not let them fight—he may be killed."

"He—who? Your lover?"

Against herself Madge's voice was cold as ice.

"No, Keith. Oh! Madge, I have been so wrong—so wicked. I never loved him, but he has been so good to me. Let me tell you all now. Give me your hand. I thought I loved the Prince; yes, I was even jealous of you, but I see now it was not love; it was vanity, idleness, wickedness. Do not judge me too hardly."

"How am I to judge you, Anice?" asked Madge, in tones of agitation; "have you not brought shame—dishonour, on my brother's life?"

Lady Anice shivered.

"No," she murmured, "I have been weak, vain, foolish! oh! most foolish; but I have not dishonoured my own name or my husband's. It is true—I swear it. Will you believe me?"

Madge bent and gazed into the eyes uplifted to her steadily for an instant, then she said,—

"Yes, Anice, I will believe you."

The girl crouched at her feet burst into a flood of tears, and Madge gently soothed her with loving words; when the paroxysm had passed she almost lifted Anice from the ground, led her to the bed, and made her rest there.

There was silence between them for a time, and the minutes slowly ticked by, then Anice put out her hand.

"Madge, go to Keith, entreat him not to fight. I dare not go—I dare not."

Madge took the hot hand in hers and smoothed back the golden curls from the aching brow.

"First tell me what brought you wandering about the house to-night? I must have the truth, Anice."

There was sternness in Madge's voice.

Anice shuddered.

"I will tell you the truth. You know, or perhaps you have not known, that I have—have flirted much lately with the Prince de Boules. He has aggravated me and tormented me by his coolness and his evident love and admiration of you. The Countess saw this, and used to whisper of his passion for you, and how that made him almost cold towards me. To-night she asked me as usual to her room for a chat. You know I gave orders she was to have the red suite of rooms, and her boudoir windows open into the garden. To my surprise and pleasure—yes, I own it, it was pleasure then—the Prince was there, and after awhile the Countess suggested we should go out for a stroll. Mad as I was I eagerly seconded this, and the Prince and I went through the window into the grounds. We had not gone far before he broke out into a declaration of love for myself—no, for you! He seemed carried away, and, seizing my hand, told me of the Countess's hatred towards us all, how that he was in her power, and that she had made him promise he would wreck Keith's happiness, but that for your sake he would break his promises, and so on. I got very angry, my pride seemed to choke me, and I suddenly turned to come in, any particle of love I had felt for this man dying as quickly as it had been born; and then, Madge, when we reached the window, it was locked and the shutters barred. I heard that woman laughing to herself within, and was nearly frantic, when by a mere chance we discovered one of the windows of the drawing-room still open, and regained the house that way. The rest you know."

Madge had listened quietly; she recognised the full folly of this girl, but something told her that Anice's tale was true, and that folly, not shame, was the worst; nevertheless, she knew to what an extent that folly had been carried, and that to Keith it must even seem like dishonour.

"Now you know all. Oh! go to Keith, go to Dunmoor, and stop this duel. Think, I shall be a murderess if they are killed. Oh! go, Madge, do go!"

Anice rose on her pillows and grasped Madge's hand.

"Promise me to remain here and rest. I will see what I can do."

Madge gently pushed her sister-in-law back on the pillows and went away.

Outside the door she put her hands to her aching brow for an instant, and then went slowly downstairs.

In the hall Lord Dunmoor was pacing to and fro.

"I am come from Anice," said Madge, faintly; and then she told the whole story, resting against the balustrade for support.

Lord Dunmoor's face was haggard and worn.

"Is this true?" he asked, gloomily.

"Yes; I believe it, every word."

A light flashed across his face, but then his face darkened.

"She has sinned almost as much, for the world will deem her dishonoured, point the finger of scorn at her."

"Not so; we must let the truth go out to the world for her sake and for Keith's."

A servant approached them at this moment.

"This note was left for you, my lord," he said, "by the Countess when she drove away."

Lord Dunmoor tore it open, and his brow contracted.

"There will be no duel," he said, as soon as they were alone. "Read."

Madge took the paper.

"I do not intend Paul, my future husband, to take part in any tomfoolery to vindicate Keith Morstoun's honour; therefore he leaves this house with me.—HELENE DE GANYANI."

She was silent for an instant.

"I am glad," she said, after a pause, "for Keith's life is precious to us. Pray Heaven this may be a lasting lesson to Anice, and that in the future happiness will come to them both."

Lord Dunmoor tore the letter to shreds.

"I must go and speak with Keith. I shall tell him all, and see what conclusion he will arrive at. Anice must not expect the tender love she has had so long and thrown away so wilfully to be continued."

"I will come with you."

And Madge went slowly through the hall to the study.

At the door she stopped.

"Let me go first," she whispered.

Lord Dunmoor nodded. As she turned the handle, the brilliant early sunshine flooded the room; it fell in glorious golden patches across the carpet, and rested gently on a man's head bent on folded arms on the table.

"He is asleep, poor fellow!" muttered Lord Dunmoor to himself.

Madge stole to her brother's side.

There was a sheet of writing-paper in front of him, and a pen still within his fingers. A sentence was half begun on the paper, and then came a stroke as if caused by a sudden jerk or start.

The girl stood riveted by the chair for one instant. There was an indefinable sense of awfulness and fear upon her.

"Keith!" she said, laying her head on his shoulder, "dear Keith, it is I, Madge."

There was no reply.

She looked back suddenly at Lord Dunmoor; her pallid lips refused to open.

The man, urged by that mute look, strode forward.

"Come, Keith, old man, wake up," he said, heartily; "all is not so bad. We have a long story to tell you, Keith."

He raised the bent figure slowly in his arms, then gasped rather than spoke,—

"Good Heaven!"

"What is it? Is he ill? Oh, Lord Dunmoor! tell me what is the matter!" cried Madge, wildly, as she saw the cold, set, white face, and watched the hands drop nerveless to the side.

"This is no place for you. Go; send help to me."

Lord Dunmoor's voice was harsh and strained.

"My place is here," returned the girl. "What do you fear? He has fainted; see, his lips move."

Lord Dunmoor shook his head.

"This night has killed him. He is dead!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SUMMER was merged in autumn, and still society gossiped of the strange things that had happened to the Comtesse de Ganyani and that fascinating man, the Prince de Boules.

"Just fancy! He was a Nihilist or a dynamitard, or something horrible," shuddered the dainty ladies who had thought him the most delightful picturesque man of his day. "And now he is dead, blown to death by his own gunpowder or something. Ugh! Well, I never really liked him, and she was terrible!"

"She had one murder on her soul," a lady said, at one of these confidential chats; "for she killed Keith Morstoun as surely as though she had plunged a knife into him. I shall never forget that night in all my life!"

"Ah, yes! tell us the story again," was the general cry.

And so the tongue of gossip wagged on—the tale of a woman's folly and a man's broken heart—till some other subject cropped up and it was banished.

Three days after that summer morning, when Madge had gazed on her brother's face set in death, the solution of that sudden death had come.

A quiet, grave man arrived at the hall and asked for Lord Dunmoor.

"I am Dr. Hewitt," he said, giving a world famous name; "and I am come to tell you all I can about Sir Keith."

"You knew him then?" Lord Dunmoor said, in surprise.

"Five days ago I was called to Lowtoun," Dr. Hewitt returned; "and when there Sir Keith wrote to me fixing an appointment. He told me he feared there was something wrong with him; indeed, there was much that was wrong. His heart was largely affected, and any great emotion or shock might have proved fatal."

"Tell this to no one but me!" exclaimed Lord Dunmoor, in agitation.

The physician agreed, though a little surprised.

"I will be silent unless I am called upon to declare the truth publicly, then I dare not be silent."

Lord Dunmoor was thinking of his sister lying in a stupor, from which no word could waken her. Was not her remorse and sorrow great enough? was his tender thought. He must spare her this if he could.

For a weary month Madge, forgetful of self, sat beside Lady Anice's sick-bed. She was worn to a faint, frail likeness of the lovely Vera Lorraine who had caused such a furore that night at the Lyric. Her heart was heavy with grief and sick with pain.

A short, curt note had come from Rex, but not to her.

He was in England again; sorrow had come upon her, and yet he never wrote.

"Ah, me!" she often thought, as she sat wearily fanning Anice's fevered brow; "how I was deceived in him! I thought he loved poor Keith, too; yet he seems to have forgotten even his memory."

And weighed down with the bitterness of grief, despite her unselfish courage, Madge drooped and pined till at the end of the month alluded to, Lord Dunmoor said to her one day, abruptly,—

"You must leave this sick-room. Anice is now on the mend; my mother will be here directly, and will nurse you both."

He gazed at the fair, thin face as he spoke, with a heart that throbbed with a deep, true love for this brave, spirited girl who had risen so nobly in the trial that had fallen upon them. But he kept his secret buried.

"It is not for me; it is Rex she loves. Why does he not come? It is breaking her heart."

Madge sighed as he spoke.

"I can do no more," she said, trying to smile. "I think I will go away; my mother-in-law will be delighted to see me. Anice is better. I will go to Bentley."

And so, worn out, and weary almost of living, Madge went back to the village that was the birth-place of her brief, sweet love-dream.

She had insisted, and Sir Keith too, on giving Mrs. Watson and Amy a small, though luxurious, home, and it was genuine pleasure, yet with tears of pity in their eyes, that the two women welcomed her to it.

Amy was shocked beyond measure at the girl's altered appearance.

"We must feed you up on country milk and eggs, Madge, darling!" she said.

"Call me, Vera," was the answer given suddenly; "I like to hear you say it."

She would not own even to herself that she liked it because Rex had spoken it.

"Vera," she said to herself; "true, that is what I shall always be, Rex, to you, and to my love."

She lived a quiet, monotonous existence in Bentley. It was a painful pleasure to tread the old narrow streets and see the Town Hall, where her triumph had been so great.

Maggie and her husband came down while she was here, and the tender-hearted Mrs. Motte burst into tears when she saw her former friend.

"Oh, Vera, darling, how you have suffered! Do come away with us. Wenty and I will take care of you, dear. Do come, do!"

But Vera shook her head.

"I have not endured half what mother did," she said, smiling faintly.

She spoke of her adopted mother, Emilie De Mortimer, whose memory was so dear to her.

"I suppose you heard of Nathaniel's death!" Maggie said, after a pause. "Drink killed him at last. Well, I can't say I am sorry; he was a brute to you."

The Mottes stayed a week, and Vera was glad to be with her staunch, true, loving friend.

"Thank Heaven! you are happy, Maggie," she said, as they parted, "for you deserve it every bit, dear."

"Ah! you will be happy some day," Maggie replied; "won't she, Wenty!"

"Yes, by Jove! she will; she shall," was Mr. Motte's emphatic conclusion, and then they glided away out of the tiny station back to London.

Amy was sorry that Maggie had to go, for Vera seemed even more depressed and ill after that visit than before.

She preferred to sit and walk alone, and all at once the natural sweetness and courage of her nature seemed gone.

"I am weary," she said to herself, "so weary! When will the end come?"

The end was nearer than she thought.

One afternoon as she put on her cloak and hat Amy said to her, lightly,—

"Vera, they say in the village that Lord Vivian has come to Beaconswold for a few days."

"Has he!" Vera answered, the colour fleeting into her face for an instant.

"He may call here. If you are out, have you any message!"

"No, none."

And Vera went rapidly from the house.

"I could not meet him, hear from his lips the truth of Rex's falseness. Are they married yet, I wonder! Heaven knows I wish them all happiness!"

She chose by accident the path across the rough moor that she had taken the day Tom Watson had knelt at her feet to thank her, and Lady Anice had sneered at her so rudely. She went on till she reached the same hollow and the very same spot on which she had rested that day.

It was just growing to a year since that time.

"A year! Will all years be as long, as horrible!" she wondered, vaguely.

Tired with her walk she sank on to the ground and rested back, and gradually the fatigue grew upon her till, soothed by the warm autumn breeze, her eyes closed, and she sank into a soft, gentle sleep.

The minutes passed. Vera was unconscious of aught but her dreams, unconscious that a man was striding across the moor, having descried her figure in the distance, and was now standing gazing down upon her in a state of remorse, anxiety, and passionate love.

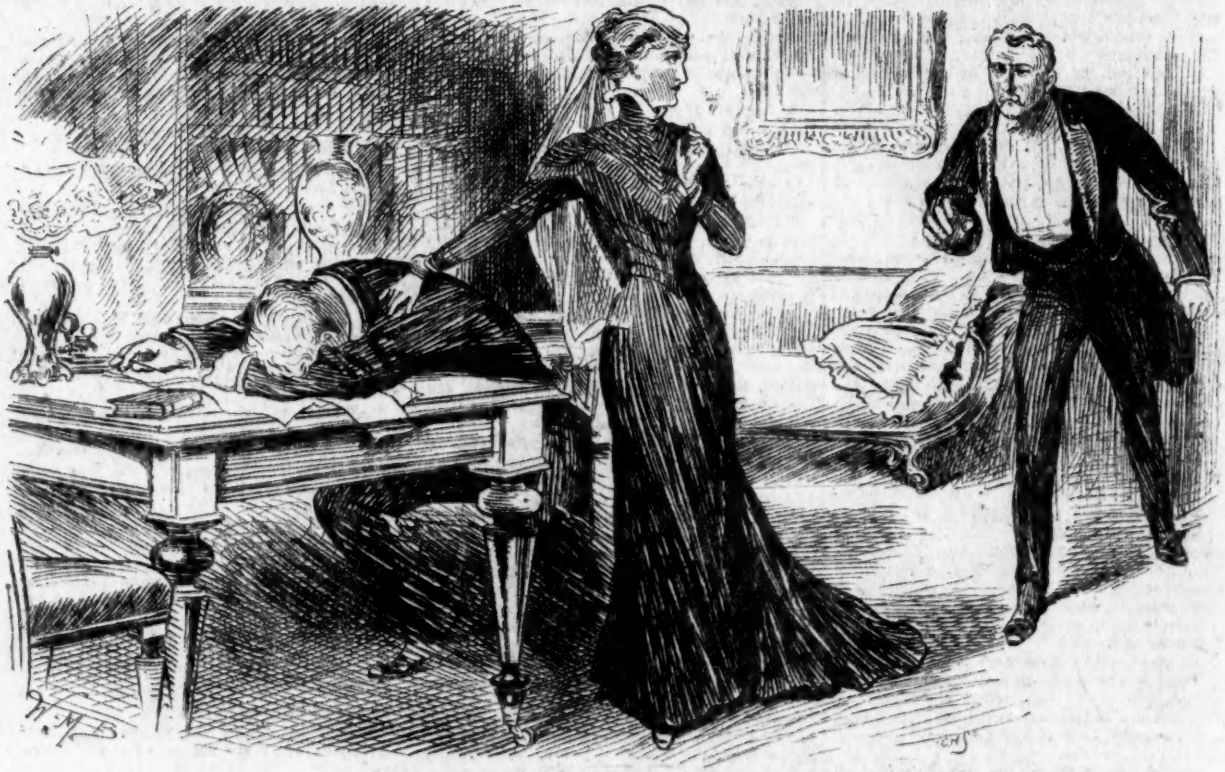
"My own sweet darling!" said Rex to himself, as he took his fill of the frail, lovely face, "how you have suffered, and I have not been near! Ah! fate has, indeed, been cruel to us, my Vera!"

He bent over her gently, and whispered her name.

She raised her eyes, and moved into a sitting position. A look of vague alarm came first; then a sudden gleam of joy in her star-like eyes; then her head, with its red-gold glory of short curls, drooped.

"You!" was all she said.

"Yes, Vera; Rex, your own true, devoted Rex. Ah! look up, my darling! Don't turn from me. I know what your gentle heart has suffered, what you have endured from what looked like my cruelty. Vera, give me your hand. Ah! that is well. You trust me! Come to my heart,



MADGE LOOKED BACK SUDDENLY AT LORD DUNMOOR; HER PALLID LIPS REFUSED TO OPEN.

dearest, while I tell you the tale of treachery that has nearly broken both our hearts."

"Treachery," murmured Vera.

Unconsciously she yielded to the joy of his presence, his arm stole round her, and she was once more resting against his breast.

Rex pressed his lips to her brow.

"Months ago, my own, when I was away, thinking of you every hour of the day, I got this letter; mark it well."

Vera gazed at it.

"I never wrote you a letter," she said, involuntarily, as her eyes rested on the writing.

"I know that now, but then—Heaven forgive me for doubting you, my darling—I thought it came from you. In it you told me curtly that you no longer loved me, that you loved Dunmoor instead, and were to be his wife before the year was out."

"Who could have done this!" cried Vera.

Quivering with emotion she would have moved from his arms, but he drew her closer still.

"No, no, don't move till I have told you all. Ah! Vera, what do I not deserve for doubting your faith and loyalty even for an instant!"

Words of self-reproach were trembling on her lips, too, but he went on quickly,—

"Yesterday I came down here with Eric. I knew you were here, and though I deemed you lost to me for ever I was not strong enough to resist the temptation of seeing you once again. My courage was not tried so terribly; for this morning, Vera, another letter came to me forwarded from London."

"Yes," she breathed rather than spoke.

"It was signed Blanche Ganyant, and was a full confession. The letter I received was a forgery—the story of my gift to her and the insinuations that we were betrothed a plot of her mother's to give you pain."

"She succeeded, indeed, only too well," Vera said, with a shiver of recollection. "But oh! Rex, I was wrong; I should have known you better."

He bent his head and kissed her lips silently, and they stood lost in the joy of that moment till Vera, fatigued by the sudden reaction, released herself from his hold and sank with a sigh on to the mound again.

"I feel sorry for that girl with such a mother, Rex," she said, after she had read Blanche's letter through.

"Yes." Rex put his foot on the mound and leaned forward on his elbow, gazing tenderly at his fair love. "Fortunately, she is freed from that wretch. You have heard of De Boules' death. It seems that this woman had always some hold over him, and was the immediate cause of his death. Through jealousy she gave secret information to a Nihilistic society who regarded him as a traitor. Then when she found the man she loved—if love were a thing capable to her—destroyed, she went nearly mad, and eventually put an end to her life—and what a life!"

"And Blanche—what of her?"

"She has been adopted by a clergyman's widow, and will be happy, I hope. She has good points, and was her mother's tool."

"We must be kind to her, Rex," whispered Vera.

He was silent.

"Yes, I know she caused our misery, but that is gone now, and we can afford to be generous;" then, with a sudden, passionate burst Vera said, "Oh! thank Heaven you have come back to me, Rex; it was a weary, weary time."

And his answer was a tender smile and kiss.

* * * * *

Morstoun Hall is once more untenanted. Lady Anice has gone back to her father's house, changed by sudden calamity and sorrow from a vain, frivolous butterfly to a woman with a woman's heart. Her remorse lives with her as keenly as ever, and though as time wears on suitors kneel at her feet she refuses one and all.

"I broke Keith's heart," she says, when she and Madge meet. "I could never forget his memory and my wrong."

And Madge Darnley's reply is to bend forward and kiss the fair, pretty face.

"Your wrong has been forgiven, Anice," she always whispers.

The two women are close friends. That night of horror was the first link in the chain that held them together.

"Poor Anice! I am sorry for her," Madge says sometimes to her husband.

"Yes, she is altered, indeed. I little thought there was so much good in her. It was you, my darling, who brought it out."

"Rex, you really think too highly of me," whispers the lovely young wife.

"Do I?" he answers, as he gazes into her face. "No, no, my Vera, that is impossible for you are not a woman, but an angel from Heaven, my darling!"

[THE END.]

At Coventry it used to be the custom to eat what were called God's cakes on New Year's Day. They were of triangular shape, about half an inch thick, and filled with a kind of mincemeat.

It is well known that the Prince of Wales is an exceedingly liberal man whenever Royal charity is concerned. But probably the smallest donation that the Prince of Wales ever gave to a movement which had his direct patronage and approval was the modest half-crown with which he headed the subscription list in connection with the fund for defraying the cost of a bust of Lord Suffield, Provincial Grand Master of the Norfolk Freemasons. The object of His Royal Highness in limiting his donation to the sum named was in order that all the brethren in the province might subscribe, for of course it would, under the circumstances, not have been proper for any of the brethren to have exceeded this amount.

"HALLO! WHO'S UP THERE?" CRIED THE RECTOR'S VOICE FROM BELOW.

TWICE CHOSEN.

—:o:—

CHAPTER I.

"SCAMP."

"SCAMP! Scamp! where are you?" cried a pleasant, manly voice; but there was not the faintest response, for "Scamp," otherwise Adela Thorndyke, was deep in a sensational novel, and had no mind to be disturbed, even by her father.

"Thomas, what has become of Miss Adela?" he asked of the old gardener, who had lived at the Rectory with him before Adela was born.

A white hand parted the leaves of an ancient walnut tree, and a dainty index finger was shaken at the factotum warningly, even menacingly; but the Rector of Winsthorpe was not a man to be trifled with, except by one person, his daughter Scamp, his one and only, and it must be added, spoilt child; and although Thomas saw the warning hand he dared not say he did not know where the young lady was.

He pushed back his hat, and screwed up his mouth gravely, and raised his honest eyes to his master's face.

"Miss Ad'la's somewheres about, sir," he said. "Maybe she won't be long."

"Come, no prevarication, Thomas; you know where she is!" and the keen grey orbs of the clergyman, who had once been an officer, fixed upon him relentlessly.

"Maybe, sir," he returned, reluctantly; "but, you see, Miss Ad'la has ears, and if she wanted to some——"

"I believe you have let her go up that tree again," said the Rector, hotly.

"Me let her!" answered the old man, in helpless bewilderment. "Lor, sir, how could I ever stop Miss Ad'la!" and he laughed an amused chuckle.

A middle-aged lady here joined the Rector, walking by the side of a tall, aristocratic-looking man of some five and-thirty years of age, whose hair was dark and close-cropped, his features fine and well chiselled, while his soft brown moustache could not hide the sweet grave mouth; his eyes were large and hazel in hue, black-lashed, and earnest in expression.

"My dear," said the Rector, irritably, "I believe Adela to be up in that tree, and I have said I won't have it, over and over again. One of these days she'll break her neck, and who would have thought it? It was easier to keep a whole regiment in order than that slip of a girl. Thomas, is Miss Adela up there or no?"

The hand became doubly animated among the green leaves, and a pair of hazel eyes were fixed upon it, while a smile parted the grave lips.

"Well, she be," replied the old man, regretfully. "I can't tell you an untruth, master."

"Oh, you sneak!" cried a bright, mellow, girlish voice, and the yellow paper-covered novel came whirling at the old man's head.

The gardener ducked, and the book hit Mr. Thorndyke upon the shoulder.

"A novel, too, I vow!" he exclaimed, angrily. "I will not allow Adela to read novels; she is too young to have her head filled with rubbish. Mamma, it is for you to see that such books do not get in her way," and he handed it to his wife.

"But really, Edward, I know nothing about it. This volume is not ours!" said Mrs. Thorndyke, somewhat helplessly, looking at it the while.

"Well, give it to me, then, and I'll find out to whom it does belong, and they shall have a piece of my mind upon the subject," and he began to turn the leaves over with a quick hand.

A sudden commotion was heard in the tree, and the leaves commenced to quiver, the boughs to shake, and a bright *espiègle* face peeped out from the branches.

"Let me have it back, dad!" said Adela, coaxingly. "I know you will, for you are such a dear old pet, and never refuse me anything."

"Nothing that is for your good, Scamp," he replied, the clouds passing from his brow, and then he turned, with a smile, to his friend.

"Did you ever know such a little witch?" he laughed. "Ah! Egerton, you're lucky not to have a daughter like Scamp to worry you."

"If that is Scamp, I don't think I should object," said Captain Egerton, his eyes fixed on the beautiful, animated face, framed in the tender green of the walnut leaves.

A golden-brown, curly head which the sun had caught and turned to burnished gold, a pair of laughing blue eyes, set in dark curved lashes, with a look of defiance in them. Two coral-red cupidon lips, and a row of pearl-like teeth—a fair, white skin, flecked with a golden freckle, and cheeks which glowed with health and strength.

"Did you ever see such a witch?" repeated her father, looking at her with loving pride. "Adela, whose book is this? I mean to know!"

When Mr. Thorndyke called her Adela, she knew he meant to try and be firm with her, and that there would be the semblance of a battle between them, and she made a mutinous moue.

Then the remembrance came to her that there was a name on one of the first pages of the book, and she determined that her father should not see it.

The lovely vision vanished, and a violent scrambling took place among the verdant leaves, and in a few moments the girl swung herself down with a graceful movement and marvellous agility, and descended upon the Rector with outstretched arms, which she threw around his neck, and kissed him on cheeks and brow; then, as if purely by accident, she took the book from his hand, and he never saw that he was vanquished.

Mrs. Thorndyke recognised the fact, and smiled, for thus the battle generally ended between her husband and daughter.

"Egerton," he said, "let me introduce you to

my girl," and turning to her, he added, "you have often heard me speak of Captain Egerton, Scamp, have you not?"

"*Often*," she answered; "but I expected to see an old fellow like——," and she hesitated and blushed.

"Like me, eh!" laughed Mr. Thorndyke. "You see she is truthful, if not polite, Egerton!"

"I would rather see it so than the other way. And so, Miss Scamp, you have heard of me? and I have very, very often heard of you; so we must be friends."

"Must we?" she asked, studying his face. "I shall like that."

"Forward young puss!" said her father, pulling her hair.

"Not forward, Thorndyke, honest; and now, young lady," he added, "are you not going to shake hands?"

"No, I wasn't, because mine are all dirty from climbing the tree," she laughed.

"I rather like clean dirt," he said, joining in her merriment.

"Now, look here, Adela," began her father, sternly, "you are too old for tree-climbing, and I won't have it!"

"Too old to climb trees, and too young to read books!" she exclaimed, piteously. "Why, dad, where is my fun to come in?"

"Bless me, child, are there not plenty of other things to do?"

"Nothing but riding Peggy barebacked, and you say I am too old for that; in fact, I am either too young or too old for everything I care to do!"

"Why, Dela, there's tennis, and badminton, and bowls, and you may ride on Peggy as often as you like with a saddle, and read the books your father chooses for you, and sit in the tent, or under the verandah. There are plenty of things to amuse you, dear child!" said Mrs. Thorndyke.

"Tennis is too tiring, unless you have someone to pick up the balls," she returned, shaking her bright head. "There's always too much wind for badminton—the shuttlecocks worry you to death. I don't care for bowls; it makes your back ache. I hate riding with a saddle, it's too tame; you might as well sit in an armchair at home. As for books of dad's choosing,"—she shrugged her well-shaped shoulders with an expressive gesture—"the less we say about them the better. As for the tent, it's stifling; and the verandah is so draughty it gives you a stiff neck for a month. Not one of those things will amuse me one little bit, mother mine; but I do love a nice book in my snug corner in the dear old tree," she added with a smile.

"Simply because you are told not to do it," said her father, warmly. "Well, I hope you will outgrow your perversity, Adela; it is the fault you should conquer. For the rest, I have no complaint against you. You are a dear, good girl. Why, where is that book:"

But Adela Thorndyke was out of earshot, or pretended to be, and was running with fleet steps across the lawn.

It is to screen someone else, not herself, she has carried off that volume. I have said I will not have books lent her until I have seen them; but she gets them, nevertheless, somehow—wheedles them out of someone, I suppose."

"I am certain she would out of me," laughed the Captain, "regardless of what you might say to me on the subject. If I am to stay here, Thorndyke, I warn you that your Scamp will be able to lead me away. I shall find myself sitting up in that tree with her before a week is out."

They all laughed at the idea; but it soon came about, for all that.

CHAPTER II.

"FRIENDS."

MR. AND MRS. THORNDYKE had gone out to pay a round of visits, and the Captain and Adela had watched them drive off in the village cart with Peggy till they were out of sight.

Then the girl turned suddenly, and looked at her companion.

"What shall we do?" she asked.

"Anything you like," he responded. "I'm at your service."

"Really? Or is that politeness?"

"Really! I'll do whatever you ask me—if it be to turn Catherine wheels like the street arabs for your amusement. I learnt the accomplishment when I was a boy."

She clapped her hands.

"I should like to see you—but I won't ask that, for you were wounded in the head, were you not? and it might make you ill."

"It's more than likely," he laughed. "I forget I am cracked china sometimes."

"And, besides, you are too tall and dignified for that sort of thing. I shouldn't like you if you looked ridiculous."

"Then you do like me, Adela?" he said, eagerly.

"Of course I do; you're a dear, and awfully nice."

They were walking round the garden now, and she stopped before a rose tree and plucked him a lovely bud, and placed it in his button-hole, with the innocent freedom of a child.

"There! now it is your turn to give me one, Captain," she said merrily.

He turned to a syringa bush laden with white flowers, filling the air with its sweetness, and picked a spray.

"Here are orange blossoms for you, Scamp," he said softly.

"Papa would call that talking nonsense," she replied, shaking her sunny head, "because they are not, and you know it, Captain Egerton."

Then they came to the old walnut tree, and stood beneath it.

"Don't you want to smoke?" she asked. "I like the smell of tobacco out-of doors."

"I shouldn't mind a weed at all," he admitted.

"Go up to my parlour," she suggested; "it's quite a little room—place one foot there, and another there, catch hold of that bough, and you will find it quite easy."

He caught her young enthusiasm, and obeyed her to the letter, and was soon looking down.

"What a delightful place!" he said. "Are you not coming up, Scamp?"

She ascended with far greater ease than he had done, with cat-like grace; and in a few moments they were seated side by side upon the leafy throne which the girl so loved—he contentedly enjoying a cigar, while she sat by, watching the white smoke curl up through the branches.

He caught sight of the book which had been the subject of dispute between her and her father, stuck in a crevice in the tree, and took it up; and as he did so, the leaves opened, and he read upon the first page the name of Horace Lake, and his eyes rested upon the words.

"Who is Horace Lake, Adela?" he asked, a strange shade of disappointment crossing his brow, and an equally strange pain contracting his heart.

"He's an awfully jolly fellow!" she returned with animation. "And he does no end of things for me. I cannot think what I should do without him."

"Oh, indeed! An how old is this paragon?"

"He is about twenty."

"And you?"

"I'm fifteen. But I thought it wasn't polite to ask ladies their ages!"

"Do you wish me to be polite, Adela?"

She sat still a moment thinking. Her large eyes looking into vacancy—self-absorbed. He laid his hand upon her arm, and she looked up at him.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

"I want you to be always just what you are," she answered, with a smile.

"A pretty compliment, Scamp," he said, with a brightened look. "Never, never more nor less to you than I am now! Is that your wish?"

"Certainly never less!" And then she hesitated, but turned her bright eyes to his frankly.

"I want you to promise that we shall always be friends!" she went on eagerly. "I know you're a great deal older, and all that, but I like you, and I don't care for many people!"

"Of course, we will be friends, Scamp. We are friends, my child, and will remain so, so long as you will let the compact last." And he took her hand and held it in a firm clasp.

Suddenly she broke out into a merry laugh. "Do you know you are encouraging me in disobedience?" she asked.

"I knew I should if ever I were put to the test!" he said, laughing too. "I told Thorndyke so!"

"Told father! And what did he say?"

"He didn't say much. He thought it was fun, but I knew it was earnest."

Again she relapsed into the transcendental mood, and as quietly broke it with the bright upturned glance.

"You won't split upon Horace, will you? You shouldn't have seen the book if I had not thought I could trust you!"

"You can trust me. The name of Horace shall not pass my lips!"

"You are a brick! I felt sure of it, or I shouldn't have asked you to be chums," she replied with animation.

"Brick! chums! The terms would have sounded fast and slangy from less beautiful lips than Adela Thorndyke's, and have disgusted the sensitive ears of Cecil Egerton, but she spoke them with such childlike grace and ease, looking so bright and happy the while, that he could not quarrel with them in her.

"Who taught you slang, young lady?" he inquired, playfully.

"Not papa, you may bet!" she laughed. "He's real riled when he hears me."

"Nor mamma?" suggested Cecil.

"Not exactly; mother is very patient—but slang does nearly give her a fit."

"Then why do you use it, little woman? It cannot add to your happiness, and from your account it diminishes that of your parents!"

"Not a bit of it. I torment them, and they enjoy it; it is like being tickled with a feather—some people delight in it. Dad and mam do in my naughtiness; they would be quite lost without it. As to slang, I simply love it; if we are to be friends you must not expect me to be sedate, and sit on my hind legs all day. I couldn't do it for anyone, not even for you!"

"Not for Horace?" he asked.

"Horace!" and she broke out into merriment. "Why, he likes it; he has taught me all the mischief I know!"

"Oh! has he? You seem an apt pupil!" retorted Captain Egerton, amusement and annoyance struggling for the mastery in his mind.

"I am," she admitted, "because I enjoy it so much!"

"*Enfant terrible!*" he sighed.

By the bye," said Adela, reflectively, "you have broken your word!"

"I have! How?"

"You said the name of Horace should not pass your lips, and it has!"

"Oh! I didn't mean to you, child!"

"Well, then you're forgiven—but to no one else, mind!"

"And what is this paragon of perfection like?" asked Cecil, somewhat bitterly.

"I never said he was perfection! I said he was awfully jolly, and so he is!"

"Well! what is he like?"

"Like? Not at all like you!"

"That is only telling me what he is not like!"

"Oh! I see, I must mind my P's and Q's with you, Mr. Severity; you're nearly as bad as Mrs. Jackson, who comes here sometimes!"

"And what does Mrs. Jackson do?"

"Do! Why, she's an authoress, and edits me upon every possible occasion. Do you know any authors? Save me from them!"

"Yes, I know a few."

"What do you think of them?"

"I generally find them inclined to be silent and reserved; people are too apt to try and draw them out, and make a show of them, I fancy, and they resent it, and keep their ideas for their books!"

"I wish Mrs. Jackson would!"

Then she began again,—

"Don't they ever try to edit you?"

"No! I suppose they think I am past it!"

"I should be glad if Mrs. Jackson would think that of me," said Adela.

"Naughty Scamp! You should wish to be improved."

"Should I?" she inquired naïvely. "Well, I don't—I like being naughty best. No one would love me half so well if I were not a Scamp. If I were tractable and obedient everyone would say I was a very good girl, and there the matter would end; there would be no further interest in me, you see; but it's a little excitement for everyone to scold me, and forgive me, and all that, both for them and for me. It must be very oppressive to be a saint!"

"It never struck me in that light before," laughed Cecil; "but now you mention it, there is something in the idea. The wild son is always the mother's favourite, I do believe."

"Of course he is! From the lost sheep in the parable down to me, the naughty one gets all the petting—the bad little animal got carried, and all the rest had to trudge home on foot."

"So I suppose you never mean to try and become a model young woman?"

"Not I. I should bore myself terribly, and how Horace and Lilian would laugh at me!"

"And who is Lilian?"

"Oh! she's a chum of mine, too. Lilian Freemantle her name is, and she's a very pretty girl indeed. It's a pity you can't see her; but she's at school now. She is the daughter of Sir Richard Freemantle of Marsden Hall, and he's an old tartar. He would make a nun of Lilian if he dared, and if it were not for me the poor girl would be crushed; but I am wicked enough for two, and help her when she wants it."

"I hope you don't lead her into mischief, Scamp."

"Of course I do when I can. Sir Richard won't let her see anyone but ourselves, and fondly thinks she cannot take any harm under the Rector's wing, and when he is here I'm as demure as a mouse."

"I didn't know mice were demure."

"Now you're editing! I didn't think you would be so nasty. You're as bad as Mrs. Jackson."

"What, quite?"

"Well, nearly. In fact, I'm not sure you're not worse, because, you know, we're friends."

"And do you think friends ought never to correct each other, little one?"

"Never. They ought to think whatever the other does is right, and accept their acts and sayings without question. That is my idea of friendship," she said, warmly, "and so it is Lilian's too."

"And Horace's?"

"Yes, and Horace's."

"Well, it is not mine, Adela," and he was silent.

The girl sat still, pondering his words, and he gently blew away his cloudlets of white vapour with an unconcerned look.

She hoped he would begin to speak again; but he did not, and she was soon tired of being quiet.

"What is yours?" she inquired at length.

"My what?" he answered, with apparent indifference.

She flushed.

"Oh, if you have so soon forgotten it does not matter!" she said, vexedly.

"And if I have not forgotten?"

"Then you're a horror!" she retorted, springing up, "and I'm off."

He stretched out his hand and stayed her.

"Where are you going, Scamp?"

"Anywhere away from you; I don't care where."

"Then you may as well sit down again."

She hesitated.

She didn't really want to go; she would much prefer to spend the rest of the afternoon by his side, but she was annoyed with him.

"Will you stay if I give you my definition of friendship?" he asked, with a smile, drawing her towards him.

"Yes, if you will do that," and his smile was reflected upon her face.

"Well, sit down, little one, and I'll try; but I'm not good at putting my thoughts upon such subjects into shape."

He took a long pull at his weed, as if to draw inspiration from it, and began,—

"I do not consider a friend shuts his eyes to obvious faults."

"That is telling me what you do not consider friendship, not what you do!" she retorted, severely, repeating his own words.

"Mocking bird!" he laughed, "you've scattered all my ideas, and they were sublime! You'll never now hear the grand image under which I was about to paint my wingless Cupid."

"Oh! a sort of lost chord, eh! Well, if this is the way you keep your promises I won't trust you again," and once more she arose, then as suddenly stopped.

"What do you mean by a wingless Cupid, Captain Egerton?"

"Do you not know the lines,—

'Friendship is love without wings?'

That will do for my definition, Scamp. Love may be blind to faults, friendship is not; Love may make difficulties fly, for friendship they will only walk."

"How do you know? Have you ever been in love?" she asked, turning her great eyes upon him.

"Never! have you?"

"No, but I should like to be; it must be such fun."

"Fun!"

"Awful fun. Do you know I am sure I should torment my lover dreadfully."

"I can quite believe it," he said, breaking out into a hearty laugh. "You're a perfect little Phyllis; your father should have named you so."

"And what did she do? something nice?" she asked archly.

"Naughty, and nice," he returned. "Don't you know the song?"

"No, do you sing it? I have heard papa say you have a beautiful voice."

"That is very kind of him, I'm sure."

"Will you sing me Phyllis?"

"Well, I'm afraid I can't after that."

"Do, please. I want so much to hear the words," and she laid her hand upon his arm in a manner not to be resisted.

He took his cigar from his lips and laid it aside, and turning to her with a smile, sang a snatch of the old ballad,—

"Phyllis is my only joy,
Faithless as the wind or seas,
Sometimes forward, sometimes coy,
Yet she never fails to please."

"It is very pretty," she said, "but Captain Egerton, do you think I am faithless?"

"I hope not, child, but who can tell? Even gold must be tried by fire. Of one thing I am certain, you will be the joy and torment of some poor fellow's life one of these days."

"Would you be sorry for him?"

"I hardly know. If you loved him a little—yes!"

"And if I were very fond of him?"

"You would make him wildly happy, or intensely miserable," he said gravely, even sadly.

"How old are you?" she asked, irrelevantly.

"I am thirty-five. Why?"

"Because you were looking a hundred just now, and as though you had been a judge on the bench all your life."

"Was I of so very severe an aspect?"

"Very. Vinegar crusts were nothing to you!"

"You're a polite young lady."

"Am I? It's to take the edge off the compliment about your voice. Go on with the song, please."

"No, thanks!"

"You're sulky!" she asserted, looking at him thoughtfully. "Well! you are touchy! I often say much worse things than that to Horace, and he doesn't mind a bit!"

"Oh! bother Horace!" he said, irritably.

"Why, certainly!" she replied, like a veritable Yankee, with an exasperating laugh.

"I'm tired of him. Who is the fellow? Does he live here?"

"If you're tired of him why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know, to be sure!"

"Well then, he is the son of Mr. Lake, the solicitor, and he'll be a lawyer himself some day I suppose—although he doesn't want to be!"

"And what does he desire to be?"

"Dear me," your interest is growing in the young man," she remarked, mockingly.

"Not at all; but as you are my friend, and he is yours, I ought to know all about him."

"Ah! that's a sort of logic, isn't it?"

"Don't tease, child; you're too young to know anything about logic."

"No, I'm not; I can prove to you by logic that it's raining now. Horace taught me how to do it!"

"Well?"

"It either rains, or it doesn't rain. It doesn't rain, therefore it rains. Do you see?"

"Not clearly."

"Ah! evidently the rain is a Scotch mist, in this instance!"

"You're a sharp young puss!"

"Have you only just found it out?" she laughed. "Horace says I'm as sharp as a blunt needle!"

"What a clever simile, and so new!" he retorted, mockingly. "Well, and what does this clear-sighted young man aspire to?"

"Well, you see," said Adela, gravely, "I don't quite like to tell you!"

"Why?"

"You might think me rude; Mr. Lake is rather a wag, you see!"

"Do you mean Horace by Mr. Lake?"

"No, his father, who is blessed with three sons, and he has made up his mind what to do with each of them."

"Oh! indeed!"

I heard him tell papa that his three boys were totally different, and that he should place them out in life according to their abilities!"

"Wise man," remarked the Captain.

"'Horace wishes to enter the army,' he said to papa, 'but that will never do, he has too many brains for an officer—he must go into my office. Tom's a rake—he will make a good soldier. Bob's a fool, and he will do for a parson; and Horace is a rogue, he's just fitted for a lawyer."

Captain Egerton broke out into a merry peal of laughter.

"The old fellow is honest, at any rate; and I'm blessed if there is not a certain amount of truth in what he says."

"Papa thinks there's a great deal."

"What, when he's a parson himself?"

"He is one from conviction, not for the sake of a living, as so many are. A young man has an uncle a bishop, and from his cradle it is settled he is to be a clergyman, no matter what his predilections are; and, besides, you're a soldier, and you acknowledge that there is a point in the remark."

"That's true. And so your friend is the rogue of the family? Does your father like him, Adela?"

"Yes, just as Mr. Lake likes me. He thinks him a pickle, but he can't help liking him."

"Shall I see him?"

"See him? no! He's at college."

Captain Egerton breathed more freely.

"He would want you to tell him all about the campaigns you have been through if you and he were to meet. He is always drawing dad out, and sometimes we have such interesting anecdotes, until he finds out the facts, and then he collapses like a telescope."

"That's very natural."

"But why don't soldiers like to talk of what they have gone through?"

"Have you ever heard of braggadocio?"

"Rather!"

"Well, soldiers see such strange sights, and go through such marvellous experiences, that if we were to tell half we have seen we should get the credit of going in for it."

"In other words, it is not churlishness, but modesty?"

"In most men, I think."

"I wish you would go on with that song!" said Adela, suddenly dashing from one subject to another.

"Will you be very nice if I do?"

"Very, very, most particularly nice!"

"How will you do it, Scamp?" he asked, softly.

"Like this," she replied, slipping her hand into his. "Won't that suit?"

"Excellently!" he laughed, as he clasped it in both his own. "But first, child, do you know I am going away to-morrow? Will you be sorry?"

"Must you go?" she asked, her eyes upraised to his.

"Duty calls."

"I wish it didn't."

"Then you like me to be with you?"

"Awfully, and especially up here in my own green den."

"I shall remember this afternoon, Scamp, as long as I live."

"I expect I shall, too."

"You are not sure, then."

"Yes I am," she acknowledged, a dimple deepening in her chin; "only I thought I'd tease you."

"Phyllis again! Child, I wonder how you and I will meet in the future?"

She looked at him in surprise.

"Why, are you not coming back to Winsthorpe, now you have found your way here once?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Ours is the first regiment for foreign service. We may be abroad for years, and by the time I return I shall find you flown from Winsthorpe, perhaps."

"Flown from Winsthorpe?"

"Yes. Married, very likely—tormenting some fool of a parson, or rake of a soldier, or rogue of a lawyer," he said, with the ghost of a smile.

"I don't think I shall be married," she answered, gravely. "I might be engaged."

"Well, well, the one is a prelude to the other, is it not?"

"Not necessarily," she returned. "I doubt if it would ever come to that with me. It would be great fun all the love-making, and that; but when it was all made, wouldn't it be dreadfully tame work? Fancy being expected to do echo to any man's opinions! Why, I should hate him in a week, and make myself disagreeable, and then he would hate me, and that would be the end of the matter."

"Until you found another lover to amuse yourself with, eh?"

"I suppose so," she replied, dubiously.

"What a child you are!" he said, a sudden light breaking out in his face. "Keep so, Scamp,—keep so till I come back. I should like to find you unchanged," he ended, with feeling.

"Should you? I thought you wanted me to be an angel instead of a——"

"Scamp!" he interrupted with a smile. "No, child, an angel would be too fluffy for my taste. Do not change till I come back, and then——"

"Then," she repeated, questioningly.

"How can I tell, child—how can I tell? Scamp, Scamp, will you promise to keep our compact of friendship? Will you never forget me? Child, you have grown strangely dear to me!"

"Never," she answered, a flush rising to her fair young cheek and an unwonted softness to her eyes. "Cecil, you will always be one apart from the rest of the world to me."

And for the first time Adela Thorndyke peeped through the door of childhood into the golden fields beyond.

A sweet chord was touched in her young heart, and vibrated with tender, scarcely understood happiness.

"Wait, child, wait!" he said earnestly; "wait till I come back."

She no longer questioned what was then to happen—a quivering hope was turning the child into a woman.

"Yes! I will wait," she said, softly.

Then he caught her in his arms, and pressed his lips to her pure white brow.

"My little Phyllis, my little Scamp! will you make me happy or miserable!" he asked.

"Hallo! who's up there!" cried the Rector's voice from below.

For the afternoon had passed, and the long hours had seemed short to the friends in the leafy parlour. The visits were paid, and Mr. Thorndyke and his wife having returned, were puzzled to know what had become of Captain Egerton and Scamp; and so intent were these two upon their conversation that they failed to hear the Rector's footstep as he came down the garden path in search of them.

"Who's up there?" he repeated angrily, as there was no response. "I'll have that tree cut down."

"Don't do that," said Cecil; "it would be a thousand pities—it is simply delightful up here, Thorndyke. Do join us!"

"Join you?" he echoed. "Has Adela dared, after all I said to her?"

"Don't repeat it, dad. I know it so well by heart; but you see I couldn't help it this once, for I was obliged to show my favourite place to Captain Egerton, because you know, after all you said about it, he would have gone away thinking I had done something dreadful if I had not proved to him that it was entirely prejudice on your part, dad."

"Entirely prejudice! Adela, I forbid."

"Yes, entirely prejudice," repeated Cecil, cutting him short. "It is quite a pleasant, natural arbour. Do come up, Rector."

"Well, Egerton, if you're going to encourage Adela in tricks like this it is a good thing you're off to-morrow."

"Ah! perhaps it is; and now I am going to ask a parting favour—will you grant it for old lang syne?"

"For old lang syne I can refuse you nothing, Cecil. I have not forgotten how, when a boy of seventeen, you carried me off the field of battle under the enemy's fire," he said, softening.

"Did he? did he? Oh! I am proud of him!" cried the girl brightly.

"You!" said her father in surprise.

"Well, my request is," said Egerton, "that you will join us here for this once!"

The Rector of Winsthorpe hesitated.

"Oh! do; please do!" cried Scamp. "Place one foot there, and the other there, catch hold of that bough, and I'll give you a hand." And she bent down such a brilliant face. "Do, you dear old dad; it will be such awful fun!"

A spirit of frolic seemed to come over the staid man, and in another moment he was scrambling up the tree in obedience to orders.

"For old lang syne!" he said, as he came panting to the top. "I wouldn't have done it for any other man in the world."

"Edward," said Mrs Thorndyke's quiet voice, "where on earth are you?"

"You may well ask," he replied. "Where, indeed? Scamp has me and Egerton up here as visitors. Perhaps you will join us, my dear? Nothing will surprise me after this."

"Nor me, nor me!" chuckled the old gardener, as he bent over his spade to hide his merriment.

"Oh! Miss Ad'la! She make everyone do as she wants."

Mrs. Thorndyke, declined her husband's friendly invitation!

(To be continued.)

When an Arab widow intends to marry again she visits the grave of her husband the night before the new marriage is to occur. She takes with her a donkey carrying two goatskins of water, which she pours upon the grave, after kneeling and praying that the departed may not be offended.

At Padstow, in Cornwall, it was the custom, so late as 1859, for the rustics to set up a pitcher at a convenient distance on the eve of the Conversion of St. Paul (January 25th) and to throw stones at it. It was called "Paul's Pitcher Day." The pitcher was pelted until it was entirely demolished. Of course, jollification and drinking succeeded the stone-throwing. This custom was in commemoration of the part which St. Paul took in the martyrdom of St. Stephen, and the fact that it was observed on the eve of the festival, and not on the day itself, gives it a special signification.

GIVE HIM BACK TO ME.

—:o:—

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHO IS THE SPY?

Lady Jane Armitage in a beautiful dress of old gold brocké and velvet was standing in a corner of the Countess of Oldthorpe's splendid ball-room with the Hon. Bertie Mayne.

There was no love lost between them, and yet each had tried to be especially agreeable to the other, perhaps because they were so terribly bored in consequence of the absence of someone else.

"The word hatred ought to be expunged from the English language," said Lady Jane, unfurling her feather fan. "We never have the energy to hate—dislike is the utmost we can manage in these days of cold calculation."

"Perhaps a cold hatred is the most deadly of all. The one that calculates and waits—waits on from year to year. You could almost fancy the arm uplifted, and the dagger already in the hand," said Bertie, slowly, a quiet smile about his lips in spite of the gravity of his words.

Lady Jane affected to shiver.

"You put it so graphically, it sounds as if you were drawing on your own experience."

"I am, to a certain extent—my own experience of others. Is there anything deadlier than a woman's feeling for the unfortunate girl who cuts her out?" with a swift glance from under his eyelashes.

A slight shade of colour stole up into Lady Jane's cheeks.

"In penny-dreadfuls the rival, I believe, is generally stabbed or poisoned."

"And in real life the same sort of thing goes on, only without the knife or the strychnine."

"In real life tragedy is the exception."

"Do you really think so?" turning round, the better to watch her face. "Do wives never break their hearts because women will flirt with their husbands?"

"How can I tell?" with a nervous laugh. "I never was a wife, so my heart is not in danger."

"Then, you see, I can generalise without offence," still watching her closely. "The women who belong to the predatory tribes will have something to answer for. If I had my way, the present Calcraft—I forget his name—should try his hand on them."

"Mr. Mayne!" opening her eyes in horror.

"I mean it," an angry light shining in his own. "They are rank cowards—for the wife is so defenceless! If she tries to avenge herself by a little flirtation on her own account there's a 'view halloo' at once, and the pack in full cry after her."

"Then I'm sure some hares like to be hunted," trying to shake off the uncomfortable impression produced by his manner.

But immediately a vision of Violet rose before her, and the reports she had so sedulously fostered.

For the future she felt she would involuntarily think of her rival as a poor helpless hunted hare, on whose trail she had started the eager hounds.

"Oh, yes! and pheasants like to be shot. We shouldn't do it, of course, if they didn't!"

"Now that's absurd! A man's pleasure is to be considered before a bird's."

"Of course; and pleasure rules the world."

"Now, Mr. Mayne, confess—you are straying from your original subject. Are you capable of a fierce hatred yourself?" turning round to meet his glance with a playful smile.

"I am, Lady Jane," was the prompt response. "There is one man living whom I could see hanged, or skinned, or crushed to death, and feel the fate too good for him!"

"You can't mean it?" with a little laugh. "Have I ever seen him? Do I know him?"

"Report says you have seen him rather oftener than his wife."

"Mr. Mayne!" with a gasp, as a flood of crimson poured over her face to the very roots of her hair. "I—I can't conceive whom you mean!"

"No, I suppose not," very quietly; "report generally lies. I know you would be the last woman on earth to stand between a man and his wife."

"Most certainly. I—I hate that sort of thing."

"You must. You and your brother pull very well together, don't you?"

Instantly she was reminded of Ralph Armitage's absurd infatuation for Violet, and her heart sank within her with an overpowering sense of shame.

Was it true that she and he, true brother and sister, were trying to drag the unfortunate girl down to the lowest depths of woe?

"Pretty well—as well as most. That is to say, he comes to me fast enough if he thinks I can help him," she said, with affected carelessness.

"That is very convenient, for then you can play into each others' hands," with an innocent smile, as if he had no such thing as a dark insinuation in his mind. "But take my advice and don't go too far, Lady Jane. Edged tools are interesting playthings, but the sooner they are dropped the better."

"Certainly; I don't like cutting my fingers. Why should Ralph and I have a liking for edged tools?" her eyes wandering over the brilliantly lighted drawing-room, as if in search of some excuse for an interruption.

She had always had a fancy that Bertie Mayne might be rather nice. He had a higher standard than most young men, and she had a sort of idea that to be approved by him was as good as an order of merit; but now he was talking so oddly that she would be thankful to get rid of him.

"How can I tell?" he said, in answer to her question. "Only I warn you that those who employ edged tools against me or mine," with a significant emphasis to show that he really meant his sister, "will find their own fingers cut before they know it."

"I don't understand why you should warn me!" haughtily, though she understood so well that every word made her feel uncomfortable.

"Of course I used 'you' in the general sense. According to what you told me just now your conscience must be perfectly clear, or I could not have mentioned the subject. I don't often speak of my sister, but I feel impelled to confide in you to-night," with a pleasant smile. "Do you know that I am as sure as possible that some woman has got between her and her husband—not in the vulgar sense," as he saw her brows drawing together. "I believe she has got hold of him somehow, that she acts as a spy on Violet's actions, that she perverts every innocent friendship into something dangerous, that she eggs on another to join in this dirty game; and between them they convince Sartoris that my poor sister, instead of being an angel of the celestial sort, is one of the fallen ones; instead of being the model wife that any man ought to be proud of, is one of the fast fraternity, who find every male amusing except their own husbands!"

She looked up at him, murmuring something confusedly, as she wondered if she must take it to herself, or if she could safely ignore it. A sudden thought struck her in the midst of her confusion; perhaps he might know where Jack Sartoris was, and end this gnawing anxiety.

"If you find out the woman show her no mercy, Mr. Mayne," she said, eagerly; "for I am sure she will deserve none. I only wish that Mr. Sartoris were here, to hear with his own ears, and see with his own eyes. You don't know where he is?"

Bertie Mayne could have laughed aloud at the *naïveté* of the question, but he remained as grave as a judge, and said quietly: "No I don't. You can't tell me, can you?"

"I? How should I, when even his bankers know nothing?"

"Do you mean to say you were kind enough to ask them? We ought to be grateful for the interest," with a sharp look that belied the simplicity of the question.

"I didn't ask," colouring deeply. "But my brother did, and the answer was that they had seen nothing of Mr. Sartoris since he last went down to Farndon Court."

"He must have drawn a cheque or two. That is the only way I believe they'll ever find out if he is in the land of the living."

"It seems he drew out a considerable sum before he went."

"What a prey for a pickpocket! Shall we take another turn, Lady Jane? You waltz so divinely."

Lady Jane did not dare to offend Bertie Mayne, so she agreed, and soon they were lost in the gyrating crowd. If her feet had been as heavy as her heart, Mr. Mayne would have had some difficulty in dragging her round the room, for he was no Hercules, and he disliked much exertion. He had enjoyed stabbing her quietly behind her moral mask, and he now chose to dance with her, because he was sure that she did not like it.

"Bertie looks as if he were really enjoying himself," Lady Stapleton remarked, with a placid smile; and so he was, but after a fashion peculiar to himself.

He knew that Lady Jane felt as if he had half skinned her, and he thought over the process with a smile of intense satisfaction. She was an admirable partner, and their steps went very well together, but she gave a sigh, as of intense relief, when the final chords of the music came, and he took his arm from round her waist.

"A capital spin!" he said, with an attempt at enthusiasm. "I felt as if we were a pair of twins, long separated, come together at last."

"I didn't," she said, breathing quickly. "I have nothing in common with you, nor you with me. I think it must be time for supper."

"May I have the honour of taking you in?"

"No, thanks. I am pledged to the veriest bore in the whole room. I was wondering where Ralph was."

"I'll go and hunt him up." With a low bow he departed, and Lady Jane breathed a devout "Thank Heaven!" He had stung her conscience, he had wounded her self-respect, he had ruthlessly dragged her back-slidings into the light of day; he had let her see in the plainest way that her hidden treacheries were known, and might any day be exposed before the world. Oh! where could she hide herself when the storm came? She had no husband behind whose strong arm to shelter herself. Her brother, by common report, was no doubt implicated in the same thing, therefore could be no good to her.

Dozens of persons must have seen how his restless eyes were always seeking the door until Lady Stapleton came sailing in with a young girl in her wake, whom she had promised to chaperon, and Bertie Mayne's close-cropped head bringing up the rear. If he had just lost all his relations by one swoop he could not have looked more tragic; and she could have shaken him for being such an idiot as to take the whole roomful into his confidence. His voice had been quite hoarse as he said, with angry eyes fixed on Lady Stapleton's smiling face,—

"May I ask why Mrs. Sartoris hasn't come?"

"My niece is unfortunate enough to have a headache, and begs to be excused."

"She might have said something else," he replied, with a sneer. "Headaches are played out, aren't they?"

"I wish they were. Ah! Lady Oldthorpe, how lovely your rooms look!" and the widow turned her back serenely on Mr. Armitage, whom she was certain by this time that she couldn't endure.

By her advice Violet had accepted the invitation in order to avoid persecution; but she never had the slightest intention of facing another meeting with Ralph Armitage so long as it was possible to avoid it.

"I wish I were dead," said Lady Jane, petulantly. "I don't believe there's anything worth living for," and yet the next moment she was forcing herself to smile as sweetly as she could on a young millionaire with an empty head and a well-stocked purse, whom she was thinking of honouring with her hand—some day, when spinsterhood had become intolerable.

Bertie Mayne started on his search for Ralph Armitage, and found him moodily meditating behind the curtains draping a window. He tapped him on his arm to attract his attention, and laughed at the nervous start he gave.

"You might be a pickpocket and I a policeman," he remarked, with a smile. "Your sister wants you."

"Oh—ah—thanks!"

"By the bye, have you ever heard anything of that fellow St. John?" Bertie asked on the spur of the moment, reminded of Holly Bank by the sight of Armitage's face.

"No, he never was a friend of mine. Why should I?" his face pale as death, his eyes wild and restless.

"Don't know," carelessly, "but if I were a friend of his I'd have the Crannock dragged. I bet you a fiver he's at the bottom of it!"

"Good heavens! Will nothing convince you?" speaking angrily to conceal his agitation. "The porter swore he went up to town."

"I daresay; but just drop me a line if you come across him. I don't know why—but somehow, I take an interest in him. You are not looking well; what's up?"

"Nothing; only bored to death. I think I shall stope," walking towards the drawing-room, and wishing Mr. Bertie Mayne—a good-looking, irreproachable young man, the hope of mothers with marriageable daughters—at the very bottom of a quite inaccessible sea!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STRANGER AT THE INN.

When Ralph Armitage went to bed that night his brain was on fire. It seemed to him, in his wild and reckless passion, that to live any longer without the woman he loved was impossible. He could not exist for another day in this state of uncertainty without doing something towards ending it.

What that "something" was to be he would tell to no one. He would have hidden it even from himself if that were possible, but at least he could conceal it from his sister.

The next morning, having slept scarcely ten minutes, he started out to do a great deal of business. About noon he was to be seen in St. James's-street, chatting pleasantly with anyone who came up for a minute's gossip, and informing everyone he came across that he was running down into the country for a few days' shooting.

"Lucky fellow!" said one, who was hurrying off to the Treasury—one or two hours late as usual. "Not tied to a desk as I am—take it out at Easter, see if I don't!"

"Going to the Forresters, I suppose?" said another, with a twinge of jealousy. "Awful shame to think I'm tied by the leg!"

"What are you thinking of? The Colonel's in town," rejoined Armitage, and then with a nod he walked on, not having mentioned his real destination.

That evening he sent for a cab, put into it a small and rather shabby portmanteau with his own hands, then got in, and was driven to Paddington Station.

"Where to, sir?" asked a porter, already shouldering his portmanteau.

"Bless me, what a fool I am!" he ejaculated, impatiently. "I never meant to come here. I told the fellow to drive to St. Pancras!"

Another cab was called and started eastwards, but before he had gone more than half-a-mile the direction was changed, and Ralph Armitage was finally deposited at Charing Cross.

Very late the next night a fly drew up at the door of the "Lion d'or," Belleville. The inmates had apparently all gone to bed, for in that remote part of Auvergne the hours are primitive, but presently a night-capped head was thrust out of a window, and an animated colloquy ensued.

The result of the colloquy was that the door was soon opened by a figure in a dressing gown, whose oddly-shaped oil-lamp cast a broad ray of light on the traveller's face.

M. Simon saw an English gentleman with dark, piercing eyes and a bushy, brown beard, and as a visitor at that time of year was either a miracle or a godsend, a voluble welcome was

extended to him at once, and he was absorbed into the ray of light, portmanteau and all, in the space of a minute and a half, whilst the driver, anathematising everything but the liberal fare he had just received, turned his tired horses towards the dark and dreary road, feeling as if he were shut out from paradise—for the paradise of the cold and hungry must be any place where there's food and warmth; of the weary, where there's rest; of the lonely, wherever a friend's face smiles a welcome.

"Write your name in our visitors' book, monsieur, please," said the landlady, the next morning, as she deposited a large volume on the table of the little salon. "We have crowds in the summer, for the scenery around is magnificent, as monsieur can see for himself," with a wave of her hand towards the window, from which a splendid chain of snow-capped mountains was visible through a shower of sleet. "But a visitor at this time of year is generally past praying for, and it is a blessing we do not wish to forget."

"You must write it yourself, madame," he said, as he turned the leaves over with a careless hand. "I hurt my fingers last night in the door of the railway carriage, and I couldn't hold a pen."

"Oh, but, monsieur, I will wait; there is no hurry."

"No, I don't know how long I shall stay. Write, and I will spell it to you."

After a few protestations, Madame took up the pen, and wrote after his dictation; and when she had ended with a final flourish, she read out, in her queer French accent,—

JOHN SARTORIS,
of Farndon Court,
Devonshire.

"That will do; now I'll give you another address which you can put in your memorandum-book. I am fond of climbing inaccessible places, and I've often met with serious accidents, so I make it a practice to give the name of a friend or a relative to the people where I am staying, so that they may have some one to appeal to if anything happens to me."

"Oh, but, monsieur, for the love of Heaven, be careful," cried Madame Simon, with uplifted hands, "or I shall not have a moment's rest when you are out of my sight."

"Madame need not afflict herself if I roll from the top of the 'Eagle's Nest' into the valley below. Life isn't such a pleasant business that we need cling on to it with both hands."

"But, monsieur, we must all wait till the good Creator calls us."

"Yes! if we've got anything to live for. Now take up your pen, madame, and write—" slowly spelling the direction, "Lady Stapleton, 50, Brook-street, London, England. That's right," inspecting it. "You write a splendid hand. Is it a mistake, or have you really got some lakes which are worth seeing in the bosom of the mountains?"

"But it's no mistake, monsieur. Only just half a league from the end of the garden you climb Mount Pilate, and find the 'Devil's Saucepan,' which is so deep that no line has ever been found long enough to measure it. The story runs that a witch was drowned there, and when the storm-winds blow you can hear her shrieks; but my husband says it's the echoes in the hollows, but men never will believe anything they ought!"

"Women believe everything," said the Englishman, whom the reader must have already guessed to be Ralph Armitage; "so they make it even between them. You must tell me some of your legends, madame; the more horrible the better I shall like them."

Madame Simon was only too well pleased to comply, as her tongue had but little chance of exercise in the winter, except in ratting the maids, or keeping her rosy-cheeked spouse in order. She sat down at Ralph's invitation, and poured out a budgetful.

There was the old miser who had his hoard in a cave of Mount Pilate, and let his grandchildren starve to death whilst he was counting his louis-dors. He was murdered by bandits, who stole his hoard, and left him, as an example to misers in the future, tied to a stake in the mountain side, where the vultures picked his bones, and the roaring winds shook his skeleton to pieces.

There was the murderer who was driven out of the village, and wandered about the mountains, living on berries and wild pears as long as summer and autumn lasted. When the winter came, and every drop of water was turned to ice, and every herb or berry hidden under three feet of snow, the priest found him one morning, when he went to early mass, lying on the altar-steps, frozen and starved, icicles a yard long hanging from his beard, his face, shrunk and withered, turned as if in a last wild prayer to the cross he had spurned in life.

"You can see his grave now, monsieur, in the corner of the churchyard. Father Antoine says a mass for the peace of his soul once a-year for nothing. Ah! but the Father is the best man that ever had a flock to look after."

"Perhaps he's afraid of the man's ghost troubling him if he doesn't," remarked Ralph, with a cynical smile.

The thought haunted him that if these good people could find out his loathsome secret he might be hunted out in the icy snow like the nameless murderer.

When he was tired of weird stories, he asked a great many questions about the natural features of the country round.

"We suffer much from the cold, and a drop of water is worth its weight in gold. In summer we can't get it without much trouble because the springs are dry and in the winter because they are frozen," said Madame, preparing to go, as she thought of the dinner.

Ralph's face grew thoughtful, as if he were solving a difficulty.

"I suppose the ice is thick on all your lakes, madame?"

"In general, monsieur; but this winter is so mild. You might draw a cannon across the ice and not break it, if it were like last year; but they tell me there is only a thin coating on the Devil's Saucepan. There are hot springs, you see, from the old volcanoes, and it is the only place where the deer have a chance of quenching their thirst. Would monsieur like an omelette for his *déjeuner*?"

Monsieur would like an omelette, and something more solid, in the shape of meat, and a bottle of Burgundy.

About three o'clock in the afternoon he sallied out. On his way he looked in at the bright little kitchen, and asked the shortest way to the top of Mount Pilate.

"Monsieur will not go there at this time of day!" Madame Simon asked, in horror. "It really is not safe—the path is slippery, and the night will be upon us before you know it."

"Make your mind easy; I'm only going to take a look round."

"Take Pierre with you, monsieur," pointing to a curly-headed boy, with a sharp sallow face and intelligent eyes.

"Thanks, I'm an unsociable fellow, and prefer to be alone. Prepare that curious dish you mentioned for my dinner—I might be ravenous. *Au revoir!*"

Replacing his cap on his head, he walked out into the shower of sleet with a shiver.

Whilst Madame, left to herself, reflected that, considering the amount the English gentleman seemed to have eaten at luncheon, when more than half the bacon and a large part of the loaf had vanished, and only a quarter of the omelette returned downstairs, she had better prepare not one dish alone, but a dinner of several courses to satisfy the foreigner's inordinate appetite.

It was late when, after toiling up a steep pathway, Ralph Armitage, struggling against wind and chilling sleet, at last reached the place of water which had earned the sobriquet of the Devil's Saucepan.

It was a curious place—a hollow cut out of the hard grey rock, which rose weird and awful on every side.

The hollow was filled with water of fathomless depth; the water was covered with a thin sheet of ice, like a piece of silver paper thrown over a vault of death.

The scream of a night hawk, the roar of the raging wind, were the only sounds.

Ralph Armitage, white as the snow, stood and shivered, whilst thoughts of life and death followed quick on each other's heels through his troubled mind.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LORD BELFEATHER IS TOO GOOD.

THE Haymarket Theatre was crowded from gallery to pit. There was not a vacant seat in the house, for it was the first night of a new piece, and public curiosity had been stirred to an unusual extent by the circulation of various rumours about the leading characters of the drama. Some people whispered that well known personages of modern society were hit off to the life. This was quite enough to fill the stalls and the boxes; others maintained that the piece would be a genuine success, the best production of a favourite author, which sent a crowd to all the other available places.

In a box on the grand tier sat Lady Stapleton, Violet Sartoris, and Mr. and Mrs. Landon. Many eyes were drawn in their direction, and ardent glances shot through opera-glasses, for Violet was looking as lovely as ever, and Mabel like the sweetest of blush roses. Their toilettes were very simple, Mabel in white, and Violet in softest grey; but they had an air which only belongs to those of good birth, and they attracted so much admiration, possibly because they did not look out for it.

"May I come?" was telegraphed as plainly as possible by the young Marquis of Belfeather, and was answered by a smile and a flutter of a fan, which brought him as surely as a beckoning hand in the course of a few minutes to the back of Violet's chair.

There he took up his post and never left it, rather to the disgust of Cyril, who had meant to have a long chat with his old friend. He had taken a small house in Chester-street, Belgravia, and had already formed countless plans, in which both Violet and Mabel were to take a part. These were to be discussed in the intervals between the acts, and Belfeather was decidedly *de trop*.

Lady Jane, looking radiantly happy, as if she had just had an offer from the man she loved, or heard she had been left an enormous legacy, was in a box on the opposite side. A smile hovered about her lips as she sat there, and her eyes glittered as if with triumph.

Bertie Mayne would have watched her narrowly and said that she was decidedly up to mischief, only, unfortunately, he was enjoying himself immensely at a bachelor dinner at his club, and Lady Jane was safe from his vigilance.

Cyril was too absolutely pure-minded to suspect her capable of playing such an odious part as she had already with regard to Violet, or else he would have kept his eye upon her, and perhaps been startled by her expression. She looked as different as possible from the dejected Lady Jane, whose actions Bertie Mayne had submitted to a surgical examination.

There was a colour in her cheeks, not brought there by the blush of shame, a light in her eyes, that made them sparkle with unusual brilliancy.

She expressed herself delighted with the play, as well as with the acting, and made none of those carping remarks, in which she generally let off some of the bitterness of her spirit.

Lady Oldthorpe's worn face relaxed into a pleased expression under her daughter's influence, and she unbent to a certain extent with regard to the millionaire whom Lady Jane liked to reserve as the last trump to be played only in case of an emergency.

"Mrs. Sartoris, I'm going abroad," said Lord Belfeather in a judiciously modified tone, which yet could not quite be designated a whisper. "Have you any particular direction in which you wish me to turn my travels?"

"How could I? Only enjoy yourself as much as you can, and come back some day to tell us all about it."

"You don't understand!" and he looked vexed

at his effort being taken for a mere pleasure-trip, when he was really doing something that was quite unselfish. "Have you forgotten the commission you gave me at The Willows?"

"Oh! Lord Belfeather, you are too good!" with a little catch in her breath. "No, don't think of me, or bother yourself about it. It is quite hopeless, and I can do nothing but wait."

"Wait, and waste the best part of your life! No, that you shan't if I can help it," he said, in suppressed excitement. "Men addicted to sport are always knocking up against each other. I've friends in all parts of the world, shooting tigers, or grizzlies, or wild boars. I'll write to the whole lot, and tell them to keep their eyes open for your husband, and I'll start on my own hook as well. Only look happy when I come back," with his winning smile; "that is all I ask."

"No, Lord Belfeather. I'm not a monster of selfishness. I—I really can't allow it," struggling for composure.

"You wouldn't hurt me so cruelly! Well, I'll ask something else as a reward, and then you shall see that I am selfish as usual."

"Ah! if you could only tell me of something I could do for you in return."

"Call me Belfeather when I come back," in the lowest of tones; "and consider me your friend."

"With all my heart. Oh! Heaven grant you success," with trembling lips. "You remember what I said at The Willows!"

"Every word."

"There was no reason, tell him that. But what am I saying! Of course, you mustn't go. What would the Duchess say!"

"She would be delighted. Her one hobby is travelling. She says it opens the mind. Now, if she said the purse, I'd quite agree with her."

"Think of all you would have to give up!"

"It is better that I should go," his voice scarcely audible. "I—I might find my way so often to Brook-street that I might become a bore."

She looked into his boyish face, intending to flash a swift denial, but she saw such fond and earnest admiration in his eyes that her lashes dropped on burning cheeks, and the words remained unsaid. And yet this boy was noble enough to start on a hopeless quest after her husband!

"Have you no other commissions for me!" he said, lightly, the next moment. "I've a wonderful eye for a pretty bonnet; and as to gloves, no one can cheat me. Are you ill!" in a sudden tone of alarm.

She leant back in her chair, white and nerveless. The thought of a real active search for her husband, with the wild hope that it excited in her heart, was too much for her. Her heart throbbed at a galloping pace, and then seemed to stand still, whilst the bright lights in the chandeliers appeared to come nearer and nearer to her eyes.

"Let me take you out. You want a breath of air," said Cyril, who was always on the watch to do her a service. He helped her to rise, then drew her hand through his arm, whilst the Marquis opened the door.

"My dear child, aren't you well! I'll come with you," and Lady Stapleton got up quickly from her chair with an expression of great concern, whilst Mabel caught up Violet's cloak and handed it to her husband, asking him at the same time if she shouldn't come, too!

Violet would not hear of their being disturbed. She would be all right in a minute; she begged them to stay to please her. But when she attempted to walk she found her legs so shaky, and her head so queer, that home and quiet were the only things she longed for. The Marquis flew on in front to find the carriage or secure a cab, whilst Cyril followed more slowly with Violet. He was wondering what it was that could have upset her.

Belfeather, for a young man—and a tolerably new acquaintance—had been talking with unusual earnestness, and Violet had listened with rapt attention.

Cyril could have betted half-a-million that she not tell him one smallest particular about the plot of the play.

It was strange, and it disturbed him in his chosen character of faithful watch-dog.

First, there was that fellow St. John, who gained such an extraordinary influence over her, and this boy seemed to be following rapidly in the same line.

Had those terrible bouts of brain-fever changed her disposition entirely! He contrasted her present ways with the life of absolute seclusion at the Priory. Then she would not even ask him to stay for a friendly dinner; now she was ready to receive anybody.

True, she was now living under her aunt's chaperonage, which made all the difference; but the wish for solitude had gone, as well as that proud standing aloof from the world which he used to think made her so superior to the rest of her sex.

Though these thoughts were fretting him at the moment, his manner to her was as gentle and tender as possible.

He stood before her to shield her from the draught, looking down with kindly eyes into her white face to see if she were better, but taking care not to fidget her with constant questions.

There were plenty of people about, and the doors were continually opening and shutting again with a loud slam. Many amused glances were cast in their direction, and one young masher nudged another with the remark,—

"I'm dashed if that isn't a regular case of spoons!"

Cyril heard it, and glared at the speaker, but at the same time Belfeather came hurrying back, quite out of breath, to say that he couldn't see the carriage anywhere, so had been obliged to secure a four-wheeler.

"Lady Stapleton's carriage!" cried the hoarse voice of a linksman.

"I gave the name of Stapleton—thought it as well," whispered the Marquis.

Violet was handed into the cab, Cyril took his place beside her. Belfeather shut the door, darted one glance of envy at her escort, raised his hat, and went back into the theatre, having promised to see after the others.

A heavy sigh, followed by a muttered curse, broke from a man who was passing,—

"And that is the woman whom I fancied disconsolate!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"WOULD I WERE A GIRL!"

"Now, my dear Violet, I insist upon your enjoying yourself to-night!" said Lady Stapleton, with a cheerful smile. "You are to forget everything that is unpleasant. You are to fancy yourself a girl again. You may flirt if you like, just for once, if you will promise not to go too far, and you are absolutely to dance every dance."

"Auntie, what are you thinking of!"

"Of you, child! I want that harum-scarum boy, Lord Belfeather, to enjoy his last evening in England; I want poor old Cyril to be re-assured as to your lively proclivities; I want you to prove to the world that you are not a broken-hearted, deserted woman," her tone growing grave.

"But supposing I am!" with a deep sigh.

"I'm not going to suppose anything of the kind," briskly. "You are young, you are not in debt, you are immensely admired—what more can the heart of woman desire!"

"Oh! nothing, of course," with an inward glance at her own desolate heart, which told her that a woman wanted love more than all the rest—love which gives the glory of the dawn to the saddest and poorest of lives.

"Don't encourage Belfeather too much; remember the boy is not made of anything else than flesh and blood; and don't forget that an old friend may seem quite as dangerous to those who don't understand the position as the newest of acquaintances."

"Why this lecture! Have I done anything wrong!" looking up in surprise.

"No, my dear; only I told Cyril once that I wished he were ugly, and perhaps I should have more peace of mind if you were marked with the small-pox."

"Thank Heaven, I'm not!" and Violet laughed softly.

Beauty is a possession that often brings the owner into difficulties, and throws many obstacles into her way; but the woman does not exist who would willingly give it away to secure herself from all perils and temptations.

"So I'm to be a girl to-night!" Violet said to herself, as she stood before the long mirror, in which her own fair image was reflected. "Let me fancy myself free—my name still Mayne—my heart as light as it used to be when Gertrude and I played at being ballet-dancers in the nursery at home. It seems centuries ago, and how much I have lived through since then!" ending her smile with a sigh.

Her dress that night was white, ornamented with heartsease, shaded from violet to mauve, and graduated from the size of an ordinary saucer to that of a half-crown.

They looked exceedingly pretty amongst the folds of exquisite white lace, and there was a slight tinge of pink in her softly rounded cheeks which gave the finishing touch to her beauty.

Ralph Armitage was to be there, for Lady Stapleton in common courtesy could not leave him out; but both Belfeather and Cyril Landon had promised to act as bodyguard to the "queen of the evening," and he was not to be allowed a single chance of a *tête à-tête*.

Other partners were to be ruthlessly sacrificed for the sake of keeping this pledge; and any amount of men would have been willing to do the same, for Violet's face was enough to bewilder both hearts and brains.

Lady Jane had delayed her brother by telling him the wrong number of the house where she had been dining, and as it was in one of those interminable streets in South Kensington, and nobody seemed to know even a next-door neighbour, he had been obliged to drive from one end of the street to the other, whilst the footman knocked at every door in succession. His temper had not been sublime to begin with; but he was in a positive fury by the time the right house was actually found; and his sister, perfectly unconscious of the trick she had played him, came out to him with a laughing remark about the time. He answered her savagely, with a loud, fierce oath, which made her shiver. She knew that he used to swear when something tried him almost beyond endurance, but he always considered it caddish to do so before a lady.

And now it was a sign that something had changed him terribly for the worse. What could it be! He had never been quite the same since that day when he stayed behind her for a few hours at the Priory; but it was the visit to Holly Bank which had seemed to have such disastrous consequences. He went there an ordinary English gentleman, a decent sort of brother, a tolerably pleasant companion. He came back a morose savage, without a civil word for anybody, not even for his only sister.

Was it a hopeless love that had altered him, or was there some terrible secret, as she often fancied as she watched his haggard face, and saw his convulsive start at the most ordinary sounds, such as a sudden knock at the door, or else a violent ring at the bell!

These thoughts came pressing on her against her will as she sat by his side in angry silence. She had apologised humbly for her mistake, and the apology had been so ungraciously received that she had said nothing since.

The long silence, and her unpleasant thoughts, made the way seem endless; and yet, before, she had felt such happiness from a secret source, which she had revealed to no one, that she could almost have sung with joy.

The first person to welcome the brother and sister was Mr. Bertie Mayne, who received them looking as simple and innocent as the white rose in his button-hole. The colour rushed into Lady Jane's cheeks as she remembered her last conversation with him, and she made a dart at Lady Stapleton, who was standing near the door in a sumptuous violet velvet.

"Had good sport!" inquired Bertie, as if on malice intent, although he knew nothing of that

run over to France; but, somehow, either intentionally or accidentally, he always trod upon the toe that hurt Ralph Armitage.

"Not altogether bad. How well this room lights up!" trying to edge his way further in, only a crowd happened to collect at the moment round the doorway.

"I forgot where you went," pursued his tormentor. "Was it to your own place, or down in Warwickshire?"

"Not to our own—birds so wild. My father and six guns went out last week, and the bags were miserable!"

"Better in Warwickshire?"

"Yes—in parts."

"You always go to Alcester, don't you?"

"Y—yes, generally."

"How are the Manvilles?"

"Oh! all right," though he didn't know in the least. The look of surprise on Bertie's face showed he had made a wrong shot.

"I'm awfully glad to hear it!" he said, heartily. "I heard she was laid up with an attack of scarlet-fever."

"Oh! she was bad of course. I was thinking of her husband. He has capital wine."

"You don't mean to say he has people to stay in the house? I heard it was shut off from all communication, even with the village!"

Ralph gave a sort of hunted look round on the smiling faces. Would nothing deliver him from this detestable man, who always seemed bent on torturing him?

"We didn't go into the house," he said, hurriedly, "we slept at the inn."

"Oh, then the quarrel's made up! Manville told me that he would be shot if he ever let a friend of his set foot in that confounded hole! I think it had something to do with the elections. By the bye, Miss Forrester told me a queer thing about Sr. John——"

"Ah! there's Mrs. Sartoris! I haven't shaken hands with her yet"

In desperation he elbowed his way through the crowd till he gained Violet's side, and with difficulty brought a smile to his face, instead of a scowl, with which to greet her.

"I have been looking forward to this for weeks," as he had the privilege of touching her hand for a minute. "Are you dancing to-night?"

"Yes, my aunt insists."

Almost before the words were out of her mouth Lord Belfeather whisked her off from under his very nose, and he was left with his request for a dance unuttered. Well, he could afford to wait, as he watched her floating round the room.

Soon she would hear that her husband was dead; soon he would be able to press his claim. How bright she looked as she laughed and chatted with the young Marquis, squandering any amount of delicious smiles upon him, for one of which Ralph Armitage would have paid a thousand pounds!

Yes! he was mad enough for anything to-night; reckless as a schoolboy in the first fever of his passion. For one kind look from those lovely eyes, for one kind word from those matchless lips, he would have perilled much; and for the right to call that beautiful face his own he had endangered his soul.

"Give me a heartease, for you have robbed me of mine!" said the Marquis, with his usual audacity.

"What would be the use? I don't want you to think of me when you are talking to an elegant Parisian. Just forget me whilst you are away, and I shall have the charm of novelty when you come back."

"You can afford to spare that charm to someone else," with a look of fervent admiration. "You remember our compact?"

"Yes, Lord Belfeather."

"Ah! if I succeed that stupid title will be dropped, and, remember, if you want me—I don't mean that," blushing slightly, "but if I can be of the smallest use a telegram to Rothschild, Paris, will always find me in course of time"

"Thanks, but I have an old friend close at hand."

"Landon's got a wife!" shortly.

"Yes, my dearest friend."

"If I were the dearest friend I should object."

"You would object to what, Lord Belfeather?" she asked, with quiet dignity.

"Now I've offended you!" he exclaimed in despair. "Oh! Mrs. Sartoris, do forgive me; it is the last time."

"You will offend me very much if you laugh at our friendship," she answered gravely. "I have known Cyril Landon all my life, and there never was anyone kinder or truer or better than he."

"A rara avis," with his chin in the air. "Shall we take another turn?"

The Marquis did not enjoy it as much as the last. He felt chilled and offended. It was one thing to devote yourself to a beautiful woman, in a spirit of the purest chivalry, as her one particular champion, and quite another to do so when the field was already occupied with an interfering old friend.

For a little while he was unusually silent, and when he surrendered Violet to another partner he worked himself up into a passion as he leant against the wall.

To-morrow he was going to give up all his pleasant daily life, with its constant round of pleasure and excitement, and start on a quest which common-sense told him now as plainly as possible was nothing but a wild-goose chase.

He was doing all this, as he thought, in utter unselfishness, and yet he was very wroth because Mrs. Sartoris would not seem disinclined to receive some measure of service from one who certainly had a prior claim.

He watched Cyril Landon dancing with her, and frowned because they seemed so perfectly happy together, forgetting that Violet had appeared to be just as bright when waltzing with himself.

It would be impossible to tell how many bright eyes watched the young Marquis whilst he was indulging in a most unusual burst of ill-temper.

He took no notice of any of them, drove mothers to despair by not paying the smallest attention to their daughters, astonished Lady Stapleton, who had looked upon him as certain to be the life and soul of the evening, and delighted Ralph Armitage, whose furious jealousy was laid to rest!

(To be continued.)

HAWKS have been seen to follow in the wake of a moving railway train, to swoop down on small birds that were suddenly disturbed and frightened by the noise and for the moment were off their guard.

CHICKENS are sold alive in Buenos Ayres by hawkers, who carry them from house to house in wicker crates swung over the back of a horse. All peddling is done by men on horseback or on foot. Turkeys are driven through the streets by peddlers. You choose the turkey you want from the flock and the owner will catch it for you.

A NOVEL and curious test for deafness or approaching deafness has just been described by a Paris specialist. If the handle of a vibrating tuning-fork be applied to the knee or other bony portion of the human frame, the sound cannot be heard by the person who possesses an unimpaired ear, but if the ear be attacked by disease, then the note can be heard distinctly.

CONSIDERING what the Prince and Princess of Wales have to do in the way of entertaining, and the state they must of necessity keep up, their income is not at all large. When the Prince was married Parliament voted him an income of £40,000 a year, and the Princess £10,000. This, with the addition of his Duchy of Cornwall revenue, means that our future King and Queen have about £110 000 a year; far less than the income of many British commoners. A further special grant of £36 000 a year was made to the Prince at the time the Duke of Clarence was about to be married, but of this the Duke of York takes three-fourths, and the remainder has become a provision for the Royal recipient's daughters.

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For villages, towns, cities, and in the country districts. Advice may be obtained in the United Kingdom from Government Agents and in Canada from Government Agents. Ladies' Committees are also formed in many places in Canada. Apply for pamphlets and all information, supplied gratis and post free, to the High Commissioner for Canada, 17, Victoria Street, London, S.W.; or to the Allan, Dominion and Elder Dempster Steamship Co.'s, or their local Agents, or the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.

Don't Cough-use

They at once check the Cough and remove the cause.

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One Lozenge alone relieves. Sold everywhere, Tins 13½d. each.

Keating's Lozenges

THERE is no market-place in Corea of any consequence for foreign meats, lard, or pork. The diet of the natives consists chiefly of rice, with fresh or salt vegetables, fish—which abound in the adjoining waters—and beef.

THE fountains of Paris are among the most interesting features of the city, and the authorities are careful to increase their attractiveness whenever an opportunity arises. An experiment has been tried by which the waters will become luminous. A sort of golden yellow will alone be employed; but the waters will assume the appearance of cascades of diamonds and topazes. The effect will be attained by means of electric lights and coloured glasses placed around the basin in such a way that the beauty of the fountain will not be diminished when seen by daylight.

THERE is very little hope of any young German being able to evade conscription. The registrars of births and the military authorities work hand in hand, and a record is kept of the movements of every citizen of the Empire. If a man enters lodgings the responsible occupier of the house has to fill up a form giving particulars of his paying guest, and hand this to the local police within three days of the new-comer's arrival, under penalty of a fine. Creditors avail themselves of this information, and the difficulties of debtors in finding that happy place where their debts are unknown, are in consequence considerably increased. The German Army, on a peace footing, consists of about 500 000 men; but in time of war, by calling out the reserve and the Landwehr, 4,300,000 men can be put in the field.

FACETIÆ.

SHE: "Don't let people know we are on our honeymoon, dearest." HE: "Very well. You carry the portmanteau."

NEW BOARDER: "I see they have no bill of fare here." Old Boarder: "Don't worry. You'll soon learn it."

"HOW dreadfully stout the general is getting!" "Yes, isn't it fortunate? Otherwise he wouldn't be able to wear all his medals."

HIX: "I killed an awful big snake to-day." DIX: "How many feet long was it?" HIX: "One hundred and ten inches. Snakes have no feet."

"YOU look bad this morning, Mr. Tumley," observed the landlady. "Yes; I didn't sleep well last night." "Insomnia?" "No; I didn't go to bed."

BYSTANDER: "Poor fellow! One of his wounds is fatal, I believe?" Policeman: "So it is; but the other wan ain't, so he has an even chance."

BLIFFERS: "Your wife is a busy little woman. Makes her own clothes, doesn't she?" Wiffers: "Every stitch." "How did you work it?" "Always fell in love with her dressmakers."

ANGRY LIEUTENANT (shouting down speaking-tube to the engine-room): "Is there an idiot at the end of this tube?" Voice from the Engine-room: "Not at this end, sir."

"POLAR EXPLORER: 'What shall I call my new book? 'A Dash for the Pole?'" Publisher: "No. Call it 'A Dash for the Lecture Platform.'"

EDITH: "Why did you dismiss Mr. Goodheart?" Blanch: "Oh, he got so he'd rather sit at home and hold my hand than take me to the theatre."

WILLIE: "Pa, what is an equinox?" Pa: "Er—lemme see. An equine-ox? Why, er—it's a sort of cross between an ox and a horse. Now, don't bother me again."

CLARA (after a tiff): "I presume you would like your ring back?" George: "Never mind; keep it. No other girl I know could use that ring, unless she wore it on her thumb."

"LET me offer you myself as a New Year's present, dear," said young Mr Goslin to her. "I can only accept useful New Year's gifts, thank you, Mr. Goslin!" replied the maiden.

"DID you go to Smith's burying?" "Yes, I did, an' a measly affair it was. Tea and bread and butter! I've buried two 'usbands, but, thank goodness, I buried 'em both with seedy cake an' 'am sangwiges."

"SEE the bad boy?" "Why is the boy bad?" "Because of a prov-erb he once read in a book." "What did the prov-erb say?" "It said: 'The good die young.'" "That is why the boy is not taking any chances."

GUS: "Belinda, if my salary were raised we could be married to-morrow." Belinda: "All right, Augustus; I'll write your employer an anonymous letter and tell him we both think he is a mean old thing."

BILSBY (who has been nailing down the carpet): "What is the use of employing a man to do a little job like that?" Mrs. Bilsby: "Perhaps the man might not have nailed baby under the carpet. That's what you've done."

"HOW did Mary enjoy the horse show?" "She had a horrid time." "I thought two of her horses won blue ribbons?" "Oh, yes; but none of her costumes got described in the papers."

MISS RICKETTS: "It is said that the contact of lips in the dark evolves a visible spark." Mr. Spudds: "That is very interesting. I had never heard of it; but we'll turn down the gas and do some experimenting!"

"BEG pardon," said the postal clerk who had sold her the stamps, "but you don't have to put a twopenny-halfpenny stamp on a letter for Canada." "I know," said she, "but the shade just matches my envelope, you know."

"DID you have any words with your mistress which caused you to leave your last place?" "Niver a wor-rd. Shure, an Oi locked her in the bathroom and tuk all me things and shlipped out as quiet as yez plaze."

"HERE'S a very good book," said the persistent railway bookstall boy "'How to Win a Woman.'" "Look here," said the bald-headed passenger, "if you've got one on how to lose 'em I'll buy it at your own price."

SHE: "Are you superstitious about the number thirteen?" He: "No, indeed. If a girl refused me thirteen times I'd know I was in great luck not to marry such an obstinate, hard-headed girl."

MOTHER: "Why, children. What's all this noise about?" Little Freddy: "We've had grandpa and Uncle Harry locked in the cupboard for an hour, an' when they get a little angrier I'm going to play going into the lions' cage."

THE CONNOISSEUR: "You don't mean to say that there was ever anything in nature like that landscape." Artist: "Well, I should say. I claim to be original in my work. I'm not a copyist, I'd have you know."

MISTRESS: "Mary, I was almost sure yesterday evening, while the policeman was in the kitchen, that I heard a sound very much like two people kissing." Mary: "Did you hear it only wanst, mum?" Mistress: "Yes." Mary: "Thin it wasn't us."

A LITTLE boy had spent his first day at school. "What did you learn?" was his aunt's question. "Didn't learn anything." "Well, what did you do?" "Didn't do anything. There was a woman who wanted to know how to spell cat, and I told her."

GLIDDEN: "Your lawn always looks in fine shape. How do you manage it?" Wartner: "Easy enough. I have two growing boys, and I tell them every day that they mustn't meddle with the lawn-mower or the garden hose. The result is that my lawn is always well shorn and well watered all the time."

BIGGS: "I wonder what makes a dog turn around three times before lying down?" Diggs: "I don't suppose anything makes him. He probably does it of his own free will."

MAUDE: "How do you like my latest photo?" Clara: "Oh, it's just too awfully lovely for anything." Maude: "Do you think it does me justice?" Clara: "Justice is no name for it, dear; it is positively merciful to you."

"THAT'S a terrible noise in the nursery, Mollie," said the mistress. "What's the matter? Can't you keep the baby quiet?" "Shure, ma'am," replied Mollie, "I can't keep him quiet unless I let him make a noise."

MRS. JONES: "Do you think that Percy Pilkins will ever marry our daughter Ethel?" Mr. Jones: "It's too early to say. Ethel says he is going to give me a box of cigars for Christmas, and I can't tell till I try one of them!"

ETHEL: "When a man talks all by himself, what is that called?" Mamma: "Why that's called a "monologue." "Oh, I see. When the cats get to talking on the back fence, that's a 'catalogue,' isn't it?"

FATHER: "Why do you let him kiss you?" Daughter: "Well, he was so nice; he asked me——" Father: "But haven't I told you you must learn to say 'No'?" Daughter: "That's what I did say. He asked me if I'd be angry if he kissed me."

WALKER: "The bride was quite a popular girl, wasn't she?" Watkinson: "Yes, indeed, the *Evening Scarifier* sent its sporting man to report it. He printed a list of rejected lovers half a column long under the heading, "Among those who also ran."

MISS SPRINGER: "Can you say, rapidly, 'She sells sea-shells,' without getting your tongue twisted?" Singer: "No, nor you either." "Well, can you say, 'What am I doing' over and over without getting tied up?" 'M'm—don't know. I'll try. 'What am I doing, what am I doing, what am I doing——" "Making a fool of yourself."

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SOCIETY.

THE Duchess of Albany intends to visit The Hague for her niece's (Queen Wilhelmina's) marriage. Her young Majesty's uncle, the Prince of Waldeck-Pyrmont, will also be present with his wife.

THE accouchement of the Empress of Russia is expected to take place early in April, so there will be no State Balls at the Winter Palace this season, which will be a great disappointment to the Court society of St. Petersburg.

No definite arrangements have even yet been concluded with regard to the Queen's spring visit to the Continent. That Her Majesty will—all being well—make such a visit is practically certain, but to what part has not been definitely settled.

THE Duchess of Coburg, who through the time she was reigning consort in the Duchy spent much money on charities and philanthropic institutions, has now made over the whole of her portion as widow of the late Duke to the same good objects.

THE Emperor of Germany's youngest son, Prince Joachim, recently completed his tenth year, and was, in accordance with family traditions, given his commission in the First Regiment of the Guards. The new officer in full uniform reported himself to the Emperor in the presence of a composite company of the Guards.

THE Queen's descendants either occupy now, or, in the natural course of events, bid fair to sit upon, seven thrones—those of the British Empire, the German Empire, the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Greece, the Grand Duchy of Hesse, the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, and the Duchy of Saxe-Meiningen.

ONE of the favourite recreations of the King of Portugal is tennis, and he frequently contests a game with his brother, the Infante Don Alphonso. In spite of the fact that the King is somewhat corpulent he plays a good volleying game, and can hold his own with the best players in Portugal. Both his Majesty and his brother figured recently in a team representing the South of Portugal.

THE German Crown Prince, although not so popular with the *volk* as his second brother, handsome Prince Eitel Fritz, is a charming fellow for all that, and as modest as he is gifted. In character he more resembles his mother than his father, but he has inherited the keen intellect and varied talents of the latter, along with his passion for soldiering.

THE King of Greece, who completed his fifty-fifth year on Christmas Eve, having been born in 1845, is unique among the Sovereigns of Europe, for he has actually reigned longer than his father, the aged King of Denmark. It was on March 30th, 1863, that he acceded to the throne, having been proclaimed King by the Greek National Assembly, while King Christian did not ascend the throne of Denmark until the middle of the November following.

THE Emperor and Empress of Russia are to leave the Crimea shortly, and until the middle of May they will reside either at the Winter Palace, in St. Petersburg, or at Tsarskoe-Selo. There is no idea of the Emperor or Empress visiting Sicily or the Riviera, as they could not possibly quit Russia for several months to come.

THERE is not a reigning Sovereign in Europe whose family is of the nation over which he rules. The House of Austria is in reality the House of Lorraine, the Hapsburgs being of Swiss origin. The King of the Belgians is a Saxe-Coburger. The King of Denmark is a Holsteiner. The young King of Spain is an Austro-Bourbon. The King of Italy is a Savoyard. The founder of the Bernadotte dynasty in Sweden was a country attorney at Pau, in Italy, less than a century and a quarter ago, and the King of the Hellenes is a Holsteiner. The Hohenzollerns were originally Swabians, being therefore partly Bavarians and partly Swiss.

STATISTICS.

WE bought 5,000 tons of Swiss cheese in 1850, and 26,000 in 1900.

THERE are 11,000 joint-stock companies to-day, against about 900 in 1800.

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY has but 250,000 nobles, against 400,000 in 1840.

LONDON'S population has grown from 959,000 to 5 millions in the last century.

THE world's population has increased from 650 millions to 1,600 millions in the last 100 years.

IN 1812 the United States enrolled 68,000 men to fight England. 2,988,000 were in the field during the Civil War in 1861-3.

GEMS.

OPPOSITION may become sweet to a man when he has christened it persecution.

EARNEST moral principle is the balance wheel of character. It regulates and keeps the whole man in order.

ADMIRATION of the beautiful in art is the power to perceive the harmony between it and the unchangeable idea of beauty in nature.

SEEK not to screen yourself from the troubles that afflict human life, but in a measure merge yourself in the common lot, and thus seek to fulfil some of the primary conditions of your duty towards your neighbour.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

COCOA MOULD.—Three tablespoonfuls of cornflour, two tablespoons sugar, half teaspoon vanilla, one tablespoon cocoa, four small breakfast cups milk and water. Put the milk and water on to boil, then stir in a bowl the cornflour, cocoa, and sugar, with a little of the milk and water cold, reserved for the purpose. Pour this all into the boiling milk and stir till it boils again, and boil for five minutes. Pour into a wet mould to cool. Turn out and eat with milk or cream. This is one of the dishes that help to nourish and build up a weakly person.

FIG PUDDING.—Ingredients:—½ lb. of figs, ¾ lb. of bread-crumbs, 6 ozs. of chopped suet, ¼ lb. of moist sugar, 1 egg (well beaten), ½ pint of milk, grated nutmeg, 1 teaspoonful of lemon juice. Mix the dry ingredients together first. The figs must be cut in small pieces. Beat up the egg, add it with the milk, and make into a stiff paste. Turn into a greased mould, and boil four hours. This pudding is better boiled than steamed, as it contains suet. Serve with cold hard sauce, to make which put two ounces of butter into a warm bowl, stir it round and round till it becomes soft, then add three ounces of castor sugar, and beat together till creamy. Flavour with a teaspoonful of lemon juice, and half the quantity of vanilla essence. Stand it in a cool place till required.

HELENA TEA CAKES.—1 lb. of flour, 2 ozs. of butter, 1 dessertspoon of sugar, 2½ teaspoons of baking-powder, 1 breakfast cup of milk. Put the flour in a basin, and also the butter (or sweet dripping will do). Rub this in quite finely among the flour, then add the sugar and baking-powder, and mix. Then stir in the milk with a spoon, and only using as much milk as makes the flour into a soft dough that is able to be rolled out. Divide the dough into three parts. Roll each piece into a quite round scone, smooth on the edges, and half an inch thick. Put this on a floured oven shelf and do the other two. Now brush them over with a little milk, or, better still, a little egg. Put them in a quick oven for about ten minutes, the quicker the oven the better. They may then be split open, buttered, and used for afternoon tea. Cut up in large or small pieces.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE first Australian wheat was grown at Sydney in 1890.

THE Armenian Church celebrates Christmas and New Year together, on January 18th.

BETWEEN 1800 and 1882 469 theatres, out of a total of 1,934, in Europe and America were burnt.

DRINKING from the wassail, or vessel bowl, is really not a Christmas, but a New Year's Eve custom.

BRITAIN'S total imports and exports in 1800 were 67 millions. To-day their total is 759 millions.

THE weight of English boys of 10 years old has increased from 59 lbs. to 64 lbs. in the past century; of girls from 57 lbs. to 63 lbs.

THE Volunteer movement began in 1798, and in 1799 George III. reviewed 6,193 Volunteers in Hyde Park.

AUSTRALIA'S first railway was from Melbourne to Hobson Bay. It was opened in 1854. Australia now has 11,000 miles of rail.

THE colouring on the new halfpenny stamp consists of a mixture of Prussian blue and chrome, without any lead, arsenic, or other irritant. The gum is obtained from starch.

WHEN going from a warm atmosphere into a cooler one always keep the mouth closed, so that the air may be warmed by its passage through the nose ere it reaches the lungs.

HOWEVER cold Christmas Day may have been, there is no record of its ever having been the coldest day of any particular year. That distinction is generally reserved for some day in January.

"PROSPERITY-SHARING."

DR. W. H. TOLMAN tells in the December *Century* of what has been done, in connection with certain great industries, in acknowledgment of the employees' moral right to something more than wages.

"It has been impossible to give more than an outline of what is being done in typical industries, but it is the firm belief of the writer that there is a genuine desire on the part of many others to do something for their people, if they can be shown the first step. To a large class of employers there is always the question, Will it pay? By way of an answer to this doubt, I quote the words of an English captain of industry, who has invested two hundred and fifty thousand pounds in cottages, schools, club-buildings, small parks, gardens, and recreation grounds in his industrial village near Liverpool. 'Whatever I have done, I planned not on the basis of charity or philanthropy, but on the principle that what they received was their rightful share, and when they were in the works they made full and ample return. I have concluded that I must share the prosperity of my business with those who have helped me to make it. It is not a question of profit-sharing, for if the flow of cheques ceases, there is always dissatisfaction and ill-feeling. I think, therefore, that the best thing I can do is to provide decent houses for the workmen, because it is my decision that those who have helped in the prosperity of my business shall feel some of that prosperity in their lives. In the schools, houses, recreation-grounds, a quarter of a million sterling has been spent, for which there is no direct return. I am convinced that, although there is no direct return, this money could not have been invested in any better way, for indirectly it has been one of the greatest features in the success of our business. I do not pose as a philanthropist, but I have attempted to do what is right, and have endeavoured to do it in the best way. Sympathy between employer and employee is the broadest foundation on which each side can take a dignified stand. I desire, therefore, to put on record my appreciation of the way our workers have lived up to their part in the success of 'Port Sunlight.'"

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

READER.—No, it all belongs to the second husband.

SCOTCH LASSIE.—Tay Bridge fell December 28th, 1879.

DISINTERESTED.—She can will her property as she pleases.

M. A. B.—Write to the Insurance Company and ask their advice.

JANE.—It is not illegal to play cards for money in a private house.

HOUSEWIFE.—To clean linoleum wash it in tepid milk and water.

BOOK LOVER.—Ancient Capua (Italy) was famous for wealth and luxury.

C. G.—Write for information to the Chaplain-General, War Office, London.

INQUIRER.—If you are the person who owes the money you must answer the summons.

ECONOMY.—To clean a black silk dress use a sponge dipped in strong black tea, cold.

PAULINE.—We should advise you to consult a doctor. Probably your blood is out of order.

G. T.—No, she can leave him when she likes, but after doing so, he is not bound to support her.

EMIGRANT.—Write to Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, Westminster, London, S.W.

ANXIOUS.—Should his conduct be good, he is usually liberated after twenty years' incarceration.

TOMMY.—Impossible to dye a waterproof coat; the process would take the whole of the proofing out of it.

SALLIE.—We doubt your succeeding at all if you change the colour. It is never a very satisfactory job.

MARRIED ONE.—Punishing a man for bigamy does not free him of liability to his first and only legal wife.

MOLLIE.—Take egg stains from silver by rubbing with a wet rag which has been dipped in common table salt.

LODGER.—As a lodger you are not liable for rates, unless you were a householder when the rate was made.

ROBY.—The Australian Federation includes Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand and the Fijian Islands. These are all colonies of Great Britain.

T. C.—Your best course would be to write to the War Office, London; explain the circumstances fully, and ask for the information you desire.

IGNORANT.—A grass widow is a woman living apart from her husband; it is a corruption of the phrase grace widow, or widow by courtesy.

W. E. G.—Marriage with the sister of a deceased wife is illegal in England. Several times efforts have been made to repeal this law, but without success.

HONEY.—You can freshen it by pouring a little hot water over the loaf and draining it off quickly; then set it in the oven to heat through and it will be as good as new.

TAFFY.—Dip a brush into paraffin oil, then into emery powder, and well rub. When all rust is removed, polish with dry soft leather, and finish off with a soft old duster.

R. A.—To clean the range, after frying, crumple a newspaper between the hands and rub the range with it. This will absorb the grease and leave the range bright as before.

ORANGE BLOSSOMS.—It is not usual for a young man on becoming engaged to a young lady to wear an engagement ring, nor is it customary for married men to thus label themselves as Benedicts.

CURIOSITY.—The top of the cart wheel goes faster than the bottom, because for the time being the bottom has become the centre of a circle, of which the rim of the wheel is the outside.

FALSE COLOURS.—A man may quite legally give himself any name he thinks fit, and any person going about saying it is a false one, thereby imputing fraud or imposition, may be proceeded against.

PERSIUS.—It is not enough that the aspirant should be well-educated and well-read, he must be gifted by nature with more than ordinary capacity, must possess tact, energy, judgment, and versatility.

GINGER.—The most difficult language on earth to learn is Basque, spoken by the inhabitants of a western district of France; the people seem to be remotely connected with the Finns, in the Baltic district of Russia.

MOUSTACHIO.—The most effectual way of removing superfluous hair is by electrolysis. By this system each hair is destroyed by electricity. It is a slow process and can only be performed by a physician or a competent scientist.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—You confound "martial law" with "court-martial." The first pertains to the law which prevails during military operations, and the other to the mode of conducting the trials of military or naval officers.

LYDIA.—To clean tinware, rub well with a damp cloth dipped in sal soda, then dry. An equally effective method is to place tin articles in a large vessel of water in which soda has been dissolved, and let it boil from ten to fifteen minutes.

MABEL.—The unmarried woman could by a will give everything she possesses to whomsoever she might think fit, passing all away from her own connections; in event of no will being left the mother, brother, and sister would each get one-third of the estate.

FURS.—Furs are usually cleaned by rubbing well with a cloth wetted with benzoline. This will remove all the grease and dirt. The fur should afterwards be dried away from the fire and brushed with a soft brush to smooth it down in the direction which the hair naturally takes.

STUDENT.—Great Britain has three general classes of Colonies. Those controlled entirely by the Home Government are Crown Colonies. In the second class the Crown retains the veto power and controls the public officers. Those of the third class have responsible government.

ETIQUETTE.—Yes, both men must lift their hats; the second young man does so in recognition of the lady who is walking with his friend, and the friend acknowledges the courtesy; similarly when the lady acknowledges any one she happens to meet, her male consort must lift his hat.

CLEANLINESS.—Rub some bichromate of potash fine, pour over it about twice the bulk of sulphuric acid, and mix this with an equal quantity of water. The dirtiest brass is cleaned in a trice. Wash immediately in plenty of water, wipe it, rub perfectly dry, and polish with powdered rottenstone.

INCOME.—If your income from all sources does not amount to more than £160 yearly, there is no income tax due; but tax must be paid by you upon the interest of any money you have borrowed upon property; the amount, however, is deducted from the next interest you pay to the bondholder.

OVER AND OVER.

A KINDLY word costs little
When a downcast face is near,
And many hearts will lighter beat
For words of friendly cheer.
Less thought for selfish planning,
And more for others' needs,
And many a heart would grow sweet flowers
Instead of worthless weeds.

If all our hearts from day to day
Could be as blithe as birds in May—
If we could carry as we go,
Some words of cheer to all we know—
How glad a place this world would grow!

We hurry, hurry onward
With thoughts of self intent
And never heed our neighbour,
So old and lone and bent.
One little act of kindness,
One gift from out our store,
Would wake his heart to singing
That would reach the further shore.

Then let us write and let us say
The same old words from day to day;
If old and young and high and low
Would scatter sunshine as they go,
How bright a place this world would grow!

T. L.—1. You should avoid strong tea or coffee, rich foods, sweets and pastries. Live simply, take plenty of healthy outdoor exercise, and your trouble will disappear. 2. Nothing looks prettier than a palm or fern. If carefully attended to, and kept free of dust by occasional sponging with warm water, a plant of this sort will last for a long time.

RED LETTER.—The term "red-letter day," meaning a lucky day, or a day marked by some joyful or auspicious event, originated from the ancient custom of marking saints' days in the calendar with red ink. Saints' days were considered propitious, and many pious people began important undertakings on such days.

R. S.—If a man died intestate, *i.e.*, without leaving a will, his personal property would be divisible among his next of kin; his wife would take one-third, and the remaining two-thirds would be distributed among the children. The eldest son is entitled to the freehold property only, and cannot claim more than his share of the personal estate.

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PEOPLE WHO NEVER GROW OLD.

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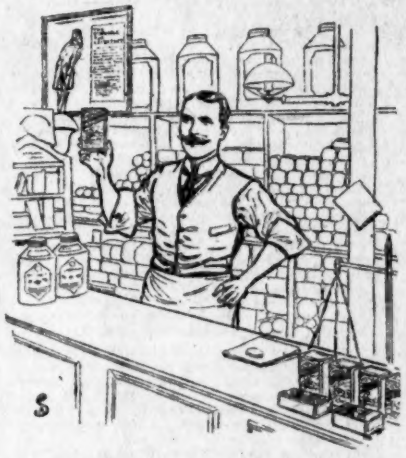

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